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Mountain Blood

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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

Mountain Blood

A Novel

By

Joseph Hergesheimer

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To

MY MOTHER

PART I

I

The fiery disc of the sun was just lifting above the shoulder of hills that held the city of Stenton when the Greenstream stage rolled briskly from its depot, a dingy frame tavern, and commenced the long journey to its high destination. The tavern was on the outskirts of town; beyond, a broad, level plain reached to a shimmering blue silhouette of mountains printed on a silvery sky; and the stage immediately left the paved street for the soft, dusty country road. Stenton was not yet awake; except for an occasional maid sleepily removing the milk from gleaming marble steps, or early workmen with swollen, sullen countenances, the streets were deserted.

The dewy freshness of morning was already lost in the rapidly mounting heat of the June day. Above the blackened willows that half hid the waterworks an oily column of smoke wavered upward in slow, thick coils, mingling with the acid odour of ammonia from a neighbouring ice manufacturing plant; a locomotive whistled, harsh and persistent; the heat vibrated in visible fans above the pavement.

From the vantage point of the back porches of Stenton the sluggish maids could see the Greenstream stage fast diminishing. The dust rose and

enveloped it, until it appeared to be a ball, gilded by the sun, rolling over the rank grey-green plain. Finally it disappeared from the vision of the awakening city.

II

It was a mountain surrey, with a top and rolled curtains, three rigid seats, and it was drawn by ugly, powerful horses in highly simplified harness. At the rear a number of mailbags, already coated with a dun film, were securely strapped.

The driver lounged forward, skilfully picking flies with his whip from the horses' backs. He had a smooth countenance, deeply tanned, and pale, clear blue eyes. At his side sat a priest in black, a man past middle age, with ashen, embittered lips, and a narrowed, chilling gaze. They were silent, contemplative; but from the seat behind them flowed a constant, buoyant, youthful chatter. A girl with a shining mass of chestnut hair gathered loosely on a virgin neck was recounting the thrilling incidents of "commencement week" for the benefit of a heavily-built young man with a handsome, masklike countenance. On the last seat a carelessly-garbed male was drawing huge clouds of smoke from a formidable cigar.

Gordon Makimmon, the driver, did not know him. He had engaged and paid for his seat the night before, evading such indirect query as Makimmon had addressed to him. It was a fundamental principle of Greenstream conduct that the direct question was inadmissible; at the same time, the

inhabitants of that far, isolated valley were, on all occasions, coldly curious about such strangers, their motives and complexions of mind, as reached their self-sufficient territory. This combined restriction and necessity produced a wily type of local inquisitor. But here Gordon's diplomacy had been in vain, his surmising at sea. The others were intimate and familiar figures:

Father Merlier's advent into Greenstream had occurred a number of years before. He had arrived with papers of introduction to one of the few papist families in that rigorously protestant neighbourhood, and immediately had erected outside the village of Greenstream a small mission school and dwelling, where he addressed himself to the herculean task of gaining converts to his faith. At first he had been regarded with unconcealed distrust—boys, when the priest's back was turned, had thrown stones at him; the turbulent element, on more than one occasion, had discussed the advisability of " running " him from the community. But it was true of both boys and men that, when they had confronted the beady black glitter of Merlier's unfaltering gaze, encountered the patent contempt of his rigid lips, they had subsided into an unintelligible mutter, and had been glad to escape.

He became an habitual sight, riding a blooded mare through the valley, over lonely trails, and was finally accepted as a recognized local institution. His title and exotic garb, the grim quality of his manhood, his austere disregard for bodily welfare, his unmistakable courage—more than any other human quality extolled throughout Greenstream—became a cause of prideful boasting in the county.

Gordon Makimmon had known Lettice Hollidew, now speaking in little girlish rushes behind him, since her first appearance in a baby carriage, nineteen or twenty years back. He had watched her without particular interest, the daughter of the richest man in Greenstream, grow out of sturdy, barelegged childhood into the girl he had now for five years been driving, in early summer and fall, to and from the boarding school at Stenton.

She was, he had noted, reserved. Other schoolgirls, in their passages from their scattered upland homes, were eager to share Gordon's seat by the whip; and, with affected giggling or ringing bursts of merriment, essayed to drive the wise, heedless mountain horses. But Lettice Hollidew had always shrunk from the prominent place on the stage; there was neither banter nor invitation in her tones as she greeted him at the outset of their repeated trips, or as she gravely thanked him at the end of the day's journey.

Her father—he was reputed to possess almost half a million dollars—was a silent man, suspicious and wary in his contact and dealings with the world; and it was probable that those qualities had been softened in Pompey Hollidew's daughter to a habit of diffidence, to a customary, instinctive repression.

No such characteristics laid their restraint on Buckley Simmons, her present companion. His immobile face, with its heavy, good features and slow-kindling comprehension, was at all times expressive of loud self-assertion, insatiable curiosity, facile confidence; from his clean-shaven lips fell always satisfied comment, pronouncement, im-

patient opinion. If Hollidew was the richest man in Greenstream, Valentine Simmons was a close second. Indeed, one might be found as wealthy as the other; as a matter of fact, the Simmons holdings in real estate, scattered broadcast over the county, would realize more than Hollidew could readily command—thus Valentine Simmons's son, Buckley.

He was elaborately garbed in grey serge, relentlessly shaped to conform to an exaggerated passing fashion, a flaring china silk tie with a broadly displayed handkerchief to match, yellow-red shoes with wide ribbands, and a stiff claret-coloured felt hat.

Gordon Makimmon, with secret dissatisfaction, compared himself with this sartorial model. Gordon's attire, purely serviceable, had apparently taken on a protective colouring from the action of time and the elements; his shirt had faded from a bright buff to a nondescript shade which blended with what had once been light corduroy trousers; his heavy shoes, treated only the evening before to a coat of preservative grease, were now covered with muck; and, pulled over his eyes, a shapeless canvas hat completed the list of the visible items of his appearance.

He swore moodily to himself as he considered the picture he must present to the dapper youth and immaculate girl behind him. He should have remembered that Lettice Hollidew would be returning from school to-day, and at least provided an emergency collar. His sister Clare was always scolding him about his clothes . . . but Clare's was very gentle scolding.

A species of uncomfortable defiance, a studied

contempt for appearance, possessed him: he was as good any day as Buckley Sim ons, the clothes on whose back had probably been stripped from the desperate need of some lean mountain inhabitant trading at the parental Simmons's counter. The carefully cherished sense of injury grew within Gordon; he suspected innuendoes, allusions to his garb, in the half-heard conversation behind him; he spoke to his horses in hard, sharp tones, and, without reason, swept the whip across their ears.

III

MEANWHILE, they drew steadily over the plain; the mountains before them gradually lost their aspect of mere silhouette; depths were discernible; the blue dissolved to green, to towering slopes dense with foliage. Directly before them a dark shadow steadily grew darker, until it was resolved into a cleft through the range. They drew nearer and nearer to the pierced barrier; the road mounted perceptibly; the trees thickened by the wayside. A covey of dun partridge fluttered out of the underbrush.

The sun was high in a burning grey vault and flooded the plain with colourless bright light. The stage paused before entering the opening in the rocky wall; the stranger in the rear seat turned for a comprehensive last survey. Simmering in a calorific envelope, the distant roofs and stacks of Stenton were visible, isolated in the white heat of the pitiless day.

Above the city hung a smudge, a thumbprint of oily black smoke, carrying the suggestion of an intolerable concentration, a focal point of the fiery discomfort. In the foreground a buzzard wheeled, inevitable, depressing.

With a sharp flourish of his whip Gordon urged

the stage into the cold humidity of the gorge. Stenton and the plain were lost as it passed between close, dripping rocks, rank verdure, masses of gigantic, paleolithic fern.

IV

THE dank, green smell hung in their nostrils after they had left the ravine for a fertile tableland. They trotted through a village strung along the road, a village of deeply-scrolled eaves under the thick foliage of maples, and of an incredible number of churches—"Reformed," "Established," qualified Methodist, uncompromising Baptist. They were all built of wood, and in varying states of repair that bore mute witness to the unequally persuasive eloquence of their several pastors.

Beyond, the way rose once more, sunny and dusty and monotonous. The priest was absorbed, muttering unintelligibly over a small, flexible volume. The conversation between Lettice Hollidew and Buckley fell into increasing periods of silence. The stranger lit a fresh cigar, the smoke from which hung out back in such clouds that the power of the stage might well have been mistaken for steam.

The road grew steeper still, and, fastening the reins about the whipstock, Gordon swung out over the wheel and walked. He was a spare man, sinewy and upright, and past the golden age of youth. He lounged over the road in a careless manner that concealed his agile strength, his tireless endurance. This indolent carriage and his seemingly slight build had, on more than one occasion,

been disastrously misleading to importunate or beery strangers. He could, and did, fight whenever chance offered, with a cold passion, a destructive abandon, that had won him, throughout the turbulent confines of Greenstream, a flattering measure of peace.

In this manner his father, just such another, had fought before him, and his grandfather before that. Nothing further back was known in Greenstream. It was well known that the first George Gordon MacKimmon—the Mac had been speedily debauched by the slurring local speech—had made his way to Virginia from Scotland, upon the final collapse of a Lost Cause. The instinct of the highlander had led him deep into the rugged ranges, where he had lived to see the town and county of Greenstream crystallize about his log walls and stony patch.

There, finally breaking down the resistance of a heroic constitution, he had succeeded in drinking himself to death. His son had grown up imbued with local tradition and ideas, and was settling seriously to a repetition of the elder's fate, when the Civil War offered him a wide, recognized field for the family belligerent spirit. He was improving this chance to the utmost with Morley's Raiders when a slug ended his activities in the second year of the war.

It was characteristic of the Makimmons that they should each have left family in precarious circumstances. They were not, they would contemptuously assert, farmers or merchants. When the timber was cut from the valley, the underbrush burned, and the superb cloth of grass started that had formed the foundation of a number of comfort-

able fortunes, the Makimmons, scornful of the effort, had remained outside the profit.

Such income as they enjoyed had been obtained from renting their acres to transient and indifferent farmers. In the crises of life and death, or under the desire for immediate and more liquor, they sold necessary slices. This continued until nothing remained for the present Gordon Makimmon but the original dwelling—now grotesquely misshapen from the addition of casual sheds and extensions—and a small number of acres on the outskirts of town.

There he lived with Clare, his sister. Their mother, the widow of that Makimmon whose disputatious temper had been dignified by the epitaph of "heroic sacrifice," had died of a complicity of patent medicines the winter before. An older brother had totally disappeared from the cognizance of Greenstream during Gordon's boyhood; and a married sister, completing the tale, lived at the opposite end of the county, held close by poverty and her own large brood.

Summer and winter Gordon Makimmon drove the stage between Greenstream and Stenton. At dawn he left Greenstream, arriving in Stenton at the end of day; the following morning he re-departed for Greenstream. This mechanical, monotonous routine satisfied his need without placing too great a strain on his energy; he enjoyed rolling over the summer roads or in the crisp clear sunlight of winter; he liked the casual converse of the chance passengers, the inevitable deference to his local knowledge, the birdlike chatter and flattery of the young women. He liked, so easily, to play oracle and wiseman; he liked the admiration called forth by

a certain theatrical prowess with the reins and whip.

On the occasions when he was too drunk to drive —not over often—a substitute was quietly found until he recovered, and little was said. Gordon Makimmon was invaluable in a public charge, a trust—he had never lost a penny of the funds he continually carried for deposit in the Stenton banks; no insult had been successfully offered to any daughter of Greenstream accompanying him without other care in the stage.

V

THEY rose steadily, crossing the roof of a ridge, and descended abruptly beyond. Green prospects opened before them—a broad valley was disclosed, with a broad, shallow stream dividing its meadows; scattered farmhouses, orderly, prosperous, commanded their shorn acres. A mailbag was detached and left at a crossroad in charge of two little girls, primly important, smothered in identical starched pink sunbonnets. The Greenstream stage splashed through the shallow, shining ford; the ascent on the far side of the valley imperceptibly began.

The sun was almost at the zenith; the shadow of the stage fell short and sharp on the dry, loamy road; a brown film covered the horses and vehicle; it sifted through the apparel of the passengers and coated their lips. The rise to the roof of the succeeding range seemed interminable; the road looped fields blue with buckwheat, groves of towering, majestic chestnut, a rocky slope, where, by a crevice, a swollen and sluggish rattlesnake dropped from sight.

At last, in the valley beyond, the half-way house, dinner, and a change of horses were reached. The forest swept down in an unbroken tide to the porch of the isolated roadside tavern; a swift stream filled the wooden structure with the ceaseless murmur of

water. In the dusty gold gloom of a spacious stable Gordon unhitched his team. Outside, in a wooden trough, he splashed his hands and face, then entered the dining-room.

A long table was occupied by an industrious company that broke the absorbed silence only by explosive requests for particularized dishes. Above the table hovered the wife of the proprietor, constantly waving a fly brush—streamers of coloured paper fastened to a slender stick—above the heads of her husband and guests.

Gordon Makimmon ate largely and rapidly, ably seconded by the strange passenger and Buckley Simmons. The priest, Merlier, ate sparingly, in an absent, perfunctory manner. Lettice Hollidew, at the opposite end of the table, displayed the generous but dainty appetite of girlhood. The coat to her suit, with a piece of lace pinned about the collar, and a new flat leather bag with a silver initial, hung from the back of her chair.

They again listlessly took their places in the stage. Buckley Simmons emulated the stranger in lighting a mahogany-coloured cigar with an ornamental band which Buckley moved toward his lips before the swiftly approaching conflagration. Gordon drove with his mind pleasantly vacant, lulled by the monotonous miles of road flickering through his vision, the shifting forms of distant peaks, virid vistas, trees and bushes near by, all saturated in the slumbrous yellow summer heat.

Gradually the aspect of their surroundings changed, the forms of the mountains grew bolder, streams raced whitely over broken, rocky beds; the ranks of the forest closed up, only a rare trail broke

the road. The orderly farmhouses, the tilled fields, disappeared; a rare cabin, roughly constructed of unbarked logs, dominated a parched patch, cut from the heart-breaking tangle of the wild, a thread of smoke creeping from a precarious chimney above the far, unbroken canopy of living green. Children with matted hair, beady-eyed like animals, in bag-like slips, filled the doorways; adults, gaunt-jawed and apathetic, straightened momentarily from their toil with the stubborn earth.

At the sharpest ascent yet encountered Gordon again left the stage. Buckley Simmons recalled a short cut through the wood, and noisily entreated Lettice Hollidew to accompany him.

"It's awfully pretty," he urged, "and easy; no rocks to cut your shoes. I'll go ahead with a stick to look out for snakes."

She shuddered charmingly at the final item and vowed she would not go a step. But he persisted and in the end persuaded her. The stranger continued unmoved in his place; Merlier shifted not a pound's weight, but sat with a cold, indifferent face turned upon the straining horses.

Gordon walked ahead, whistling under his breath, and, with a single skilful twist, he rolled a cigarette from a muslin bag of tobacco labelled Green Goose.

The short cut into which Buckley and Lettice Hollidew disappeared refound the road, Gordon knew, over a mile above; and he was surprised, shortly, to see the girl's white waist moving rapidly into the open. She was alone, breathing in excited gasps, which she struggled to subdue. Her face, that five minutes before had been so creamily, placidly com-

posed, was now hotly red; her eyes shone with angry, unshed tears.

Gordon's lips formed a silent exclamation . . . Buckley evidently had made an error in judgment. Lettice stepped out into the road, and, plainly unwilling to encounter the questioning eyes in the stage, walked rigidly beside Gordon. Behind the obvious confusion, the hurt surprise of her countenance, an unexpected, dormant quality had been stirred into being. The crimson flood in her cheeks had stained more than her clear skin—it had coloured her gracile and candid girlhood so that it would never again be pellucid; into it had been spilled some of the indelible dye of woman.

Gordon Makimmon gazed with newly-awakened interest at Lettice; for the first time he thought of her as other than a school-girl; for the first time he discovered in her the potent, magnetic, disturbing quality of sex. Buckley Simmons had clumsily forced it into consciousness. A fleeting, unformulated regret enveloped him in the shadow of its melancholy, an intangible, formless sorrow at the swift passage of youth, the inevitable lapse of time. A mounting anger at Buckley possessed him . . . she had been in his, Gordon Makimmon's, care. The anger touched his pride, his self-esteem, and grew cold, deliberate: he watched with a contracted jaw for Simmons's appearance.

"Why," he exclaimed, in a lowered voice, "that lown tore your pretty shirtwaist!"

"He had no reason at all," she protested; "it was just horrid." A little shiver ran over her. "He . . . he held me and kissed . . . hateful."

"I'll teach him to keep his kissing where it's

liked," Gordon proclaimed. His instinctively theatrical manner diminished not a jot the menace of the threat.

"Oh! please, please don't fight." She turned a deeply concerned countenance upon him. "That would hurt me very much more——"

"It won't be a fight," he reassured her, "only a little hint, something for Buck to think about. No one will know." He could not resist adding, "Most people go a good length before fighting with me."

"I have heard that you are awfully——" she hesitated; then "brave."

"It was 'ugly' you heard," he quickly supplied the pause. "But that's not true; I don't fight like some men, just for a good time. Why, in the towns over the West Virginia line they fight all night; they'll fight—kill each other—for two bits, or a drink of liquor. . . . There's Buckley now, coming in above."

Buckley Simmons entered the road from a narrow trail a number of yards ahead of the stage. He tramped heavily, holding a hickory switch in one hand, cutting savagely at the underbrush. The stage leisurely caught up to him until the horses' heads were opposite his thickset form. Gordon, from the other side of the team, swung himself into his seat. He grasped the whip, and, leaning out, swept the heavy leather thong in a vicious circle. It whistled above the horses, causing them to plunge, and the lash, stopped suddenly, drew across Buckley Simmons's face. For an instant his startled countenance was white, and then it was wet, gleaming and scarlet. He pressed his hands to his mouth and stumbled confused into the ditch.

Gordon stopped the stage. Merlier gave vent to a sibilant exclamation, and Lettice Hollidew covered her eyes. The stranger sprang to the road and hurried to the injured man's side. Gordon got down slowly. "Where did it get him?" he inquired, with a shallow show of concern. He regarded with indifferent eyes the gaping cut across Simmons's jaw, while the stranger was converting a large linen handkerchief into a ready bandage.

Buckley, in stammering, shocked rage, began to curse Gordon's clumsiness, and, in his excitement, the wound bled more redly. "You will have to keep quiet," he was told, "for this afternoon anyhow."

"I'm not a dam blind bat," Gordon informed his victim in a rapid undertone; "my eyes are sharper than usual to-day." Above the stained bandage Simmons's gaze was blankly enraged. "That won't danger you none," Gordon continued, in louder, apparently unstudied tones; "but you can't kiss the girls for a couple of weeks."

Buckley Simmons was assisted into the rear seat; Lettice sat alone, her face hidden by the flowery rim of her hat; Merlier was silent, indifferent, bland. The way grew increasingly wilder, and climbed and climbed; at their back dipped and spread mile upon mile of unbroken hemlock; the minute clearings, the solitary cabins, were lost in the still expanse of tree tops; the mountain towered blue, abrupt, before them. The stranger consulted a small map. "This is Buck Mountain," he announced rather than queried; "Greenstream Village is beyond, west from here, with the valley running north and south."

"You have got us laid out right," Gordon

assented; "this all's not new to you." It was as close to the direct question as Gordon Makimmon could bring himself. And, in the sequel, it proved the wisdom of his creed; for, obviously, the other avoided the implied query. "The Government prints a good map," he remarked, and turned his shoulder squarely upon any prolongation of the conversation.

They were now at the summit of Buck Mountain, but dense juniper thickets hid from them any extended view. After a turn, over the washed, rocky road, the Greenstream Valley lay outspread below.

The sun was lowering, and the shadow of the western range swept down the great sombre wooded wall towering against an illimitable vault of rosy light; the lengthening shadows of the groves of trees on the lower slope fell into the dark, cool emerald cleft. It was scarcely three fields across the shorn cultivated space to the opposite precipitous barrier; between, the valley ran narrow and rich into a faint, broken haze of peaks thinly blue on either hand. And, held in the still green heart of that withdrawn hidden space, the village lay along its white highway.

The stage dropped with short, sharp rushes down the winding road; the houses lost the toy-like aspect of distance; cowbells clashed faintly; a dog's bark quivered, suspended in hushed space. The stage passed the first scattered houses, and was speedily in the village: each dwelling had, behind a white picket fence, a strip of sod and a tangle of simple, gay flowers—scarlet, white, purple, and yellow, now coated with a fine, chalky summer dust. The dwellings were, for the most part, frame, with a

rare structure of brick under mansard slates green with moss. The back yards were fenced from the fields, on which hay had been cut and stood in high ricks, now casting long mauve shadows over the close, brilliant green. The stage passed the white board structure of the Methodist Church and stopped before the shallow portico of the post-office.

VI

A SMALL, familiar group awaited the arrival of the mail; and from it several figures detached themselves. The postmaster stepped forward, and assisted Gordon in unfastening the mailbags; a clerk from Valentine Simmons's store, in shirt-sleeves elaborately restrained by pink bowed elastics, inquired for a package by express; and Pompey Hollidew pushed impatiently forward, apparently anxious for a speedy view of his daughter. This laudable assumption was, however, immediately upset by the absent nod he bestowed upon Lettice, and the evident interest and relief with which he turned to the stranger descending from the stage.

"Mr. Hollidew?" the latter inquired, with ill-concealed surprise.

Pompey Hollidew, the richest man in Greenstream, wore—as was customary with him—a crumpled yellow shirt, open at his stringy throat, and innocent of tie; his trousers, one time lavender, had faded to a repulsive, colourless hue, and hung frayed about cheap heavy shoes, fastened by copper rivets. An ancient cutaway of broadcloth, spotted and greenish, with an incomplete mustering of buttons, drooped about his heavy, bowed shoulders; and a weather-beaten derby, seemingly unbrushed for countless grimy years, completed his forlorn garb.

His face was long, with vertical pallid folds gathered loosely into a chin frosted with unkempt silver; his mouth was lipless, close, shadowed by an overhanging, swollen nose; and, from beneath deep, troubled brows pale blue eyes set close together regarded life sceptically, intently, with appalling avidity, veiled yet discernible.

He disappeared, clutching the stranger's sleeve, with an effort at geniality. Simmons's clerk ruefully tested the weight of a small, heavily nailed box.

Lettice Hollidew slowly assembled her travelling effects. It was evident that she wished to say something to Gordon, for she lingered, patently playing with her gloves, directing at him bright, nervous glances from under the straw brim of her hat. But she was forced to depart in silence, for Buckley Simmons, in reply to the queries about the cause of his accident, launched upon a loud, angry explanation of the obvious aspect of the incident.

"The clumsy yap!" he pointedly exclaimed.

Gordon entered the group of which Buckley was the hub. "It was too bad to spoil Buck for the girls," he pronounced coolly; "but he'll be after them again in a couple of weeks."

He gazed with level disdain into the tempest gathering in Simmons's eyes above the dark, spotted handkerchief. He paused, deliberately insolent, challenging a rejoinder, until, none breaking the strained silence, he swung about, and, at the horses' heads, led them to their stabling at Peterman's Hotel. He passed the unpainted wooden front of the office of the *Greenstream Bugle;* the house of Senator Themeny in its lindens on a spreading lawn;

on the opposite side the mellow brick face of the Courthouse under towering poplars, and Valentine Simmons's store.

Gordon stopped at the latter on his way home. It was a long, shedlike structure with a false façade; before it, elevated a man's height from the road, was the broad platform where the mountain wagons unloaded their merchandise; on the side facing the Courthouse ran a wooden hitching rail. Inside, on the left, Simmons's private office was shut in glass from the main floor of the store; long counters led back into a semi-obscurity, where a clerk was lighting a row of swinging kerosene lamps.

"Chalk them up, Sampson," Gordon carelessly told the clerk who wrapped up his purchases. "How much are those?" he added, indicating a pair of women's low white shoes.

"Four. They're real buck, and a topnotch article. Nothing better comes."

Gordon turned them over in his hand; they would, he thought, just fit Clare; she liked pretty articles of attire; she had not been so well lately. Clare was a faithful sister. "Just add them to the bundle," he directed in a lordly manner.

The clerk hesitated, and glanced toward the private office, where Simmons's head could be seen, pinkly bald. "Do you think you'd better, Gordon?" he asked; "the boss has been crabbed lately about some of the old accounts, and yours has waited as long as any. I wouldn't get nothing to catch his eye——"

"Add the shoes to my bundle," Gordon repeated with a narrowing gaze; "I always ask for the advice I need."

Outside he endeavoured to recall when he had last paid anything on his account at Simmons's store. This was the last week in June . . . had he paid any in April ? in November ? He was not able to remember the occasion of his last settlement. He must attend to that; he had other obligations, too, small but long overdue. He cursed the fluid quality of his wage, for ever flowing through his fingers. He must apportion his expenditures more carefully, or, better yet, give all his money to Clare; the high-power rifle he had purchased in Stenton the year before had crippled their resources; his last Christmas present to Clare had been a heavy drain; he had not yet recovered from the generous funeral he had given their mother.

He was unaccustomed to such considerations. They interfered with the large view he held of himself, of his importance, his deserts; they limited his necessity for a natural indifference to penny matters; and he dismissed them with an uneasy movement of his shoulders.

He passed the discoloured plaster bulk of the Presbyterian Church, the drug store and dwelling of Dr. Pelliter, and was on the outskirts of the village. The shadow of the western range had now slipped across the valley and nearly climbed the opposite wall; lavender scarfs of mist veiled the far, jumbled peaks in the darkling rift; slim, swaying columns of smoke from the clustered chimneys of Greenstream towered dizzily through the shaded air to where, high above, they were transformed to gold by the last up-flung rays of the sun.

VII

A SMOOTH conical hill rose sharply to the left, momentarily shutting out the valley; and beyond, at the foot of a steep declivity, stood the Makimmon dwelling. It had originally been a four-square log house, but the logs had been covered by boards, and to its present irregular length, one room in width, had been added an uneven roofed porch broadside on a narrow lip of sod by a wide, shallow stream. An indifferent stand of corn held precariously to the sharp slope from the public road; an unkempt cow grazed the dank sod by a primitive well sweep; a heap of tin cans, bright or rusted, their fading paper labels loose and littering the grass, had been untidily accumulated at a back door.

Gordon passed about the end of his dwelling to the side that faced the water. A wave of hot air, a heavy, greasy odour and the sputtering of boiling fat, swept out from the kitchen. He filled a tin basin on the porch from a convenient bucket of water, and made a hasty toilet.

Clare paused at the door, a long-handled spoon in her attenuated grasp; she was an emaciated woman of thirty, with prominent cheek bones, a thin, sensitive nose, and a colourless mouth set in a harsh line by excessive physical suffering. There was about her, in spite of her gaunt features and

narrow, stooping frame, something appealingly simple, girlish. A blue ribband made a gay note in her faded, scant hair; she had pinned a piece of draggled colour about her throat. "I've been looking for you the half hour," she said querulously; "draw up t' the table."

"I stopped at Simmons's, and brought you a pretty, too; it's in the bundle."

"Gordon!" she exclaimed, as he unwrapped the shoes, "they are elegant! Had you ought to have got them? We need so much—mosquito bar, the flies are terrible wearing, the roof's crying for tin, and——"

"You're as bad as Sampson," he interrupted her, almost shortly; "we've got to have pleasures as well as profits. And, too," he directed, "don't put those shoes away like you did that watered silk shawl I got you in Stenton. Wear them . . . to-night."

"Oh, no!" she cried, "not just setting around; they'll get smudged. Not to-night, Gordon; maybe to-morrow; or when I go to church."

"To-night," he repeated inexorably.

A bare stained table with spreading legs pinned through the oak board was ranged against a bench on the kitchen wall, where, in the watery light of a small glass lamp, Gordon and Clare Makimmon ate their supper of flat, dark, salt-raised bread, strips of bacon and dripping greens, and swimming, purplish preserves.

After supper they sat on the narrow porch, facing the dark, whispering stream, the night pouring into the deep, still valley. A cold air rose from the surface of the water, and Clare wrapped a worn

piece of blanket about her shoulders. At frequent intervals she gazed with palpable delight at her feet, shod in the "real buck." A deep, melancholy chorus of frogs rose from the creek, mingling with the high, metallic shrilling of crickets, the reiterated calling of whippoorwills from a thicket of pines.

Gordon Makimmon settled into a waking somnolence, lulled by the familiar, profound, withdrawn repose of the valley. He could distinguish Clare's form weaving back and forth in a low rocker; the moonless summer night embraced, hid, all; there were no lights in the house at his back, no lights visible in the village beyond; only the impenetrable blackness of the opposite range and the abrupt band of stars.

Suddenly Clare's even breathing, the tracking sound of the chair, ceased; she drew two or three sharp, gasping inspirations. Gordon, instantly alert, rose and stood over her. "Is it bad to-night again?" he asked solicitously; "shall I get you the ginger water?"

"None . . . in the house," she articulated laboriously; "pretty . . . bad.

"No, don't leave me; just set; I'll be better in a spell." He fetched her a glass of water, from which she gulped spasmodically, clutching his wrist with cold, wet fingers. Then the tension relaxed, her breathing grew more normal. "It's by now," she proclaimed unsteadily.

"I'm going back the road for a little ginger," he told her from the edge of the porch; "we'd best have the bottle filled."

The drug store was dark, closed for the night, and Gordon continued to Simmons's store. The row of

swinging kerosene lamps cast a thick yellow radiance over the long counters, the variously laden shelves. The store was filled with the odour of coffee, the penetrating smell of print muslins.

"Mr. Simmons wants you a minute in the office," the clerk responded indirectly to his request for ginger. Gordon instinctively masked a gathering premonition of trouble. "Fill her up the while," he demanded, pushing forward the empty bottle.

Valentine Simmons was a small man with a pinkly bald head ornamented with fluffs of white hair like cotton-wool above his ears, and precise, shaven lips for ever awry in the pronouncing of rallying or benevolent sentences; these, with appropriate religious sentiments, formed nine-tenths of his discourse, through which the rare words that revealed his purposes, his desires, flashed like slender and ruthless knives.

He was bending over a tall, narrow ledger when Gordon entered the office; but he immediately closed the book and swung about in his chair. The small enclosure was hot and filled with the odour of scorching metal, the buzzing of a large, blundering fly.

"Ah!" Valentine Simmons exclaimed pleasantly; "our link with the outer world, our faithful messenger. . . . I wanted to see you; ah, yes." He turned over the pages of a second, heavier ledger at his hand. "Here it is—Gordon Makimmon, good Scotch Presbyterian name. Five hundred and thirty dollars," he said suddenly, unexpectedly.

Gordon was unable to credit his senses, the fact that this was the sum of his indebtedness; it was an absurd mistake, and he said so.

"Everything listed against its date," the other returned imperturbably, "down to a pair of white buck shoes for a lady to-day—a generous present for some enslaver."

"My sister," Gordon muttered ineptly. Five hundred and thirty dollars, he repeated incredulously to himself. Five hundred. . . . "How long has it been standing?" he asked.

The other consulted the book. "Two years, a month and four days," he returned exactly.

"But no notice was served on me; nothing was said about my bill."

"Ah, we don't like to annoy old friends; just a little word at necessary intervals."

Old rumours, stories, came to Gordon's memory in regard to the long credit extended by Simmons to "old friends," the absence of any rendered accounts; and, in that connection, the thought of the number of homesteads throughout the county that had come, through forced sales, into the storekeeper's hands. The circumstantial details of these events had been bitten by impassioned oaths into his mind, together with the memory of the dreary ruin that had settled upon the evicted.

"I can give you something day after to-morrow, when I am paid."

"Entirely satisfactory; three hundred—no, for you two hundred and fifty dollars will be sufficient; the rest another time . . . whenever you are able."

"I get two dollars and fifty cents a day," Gordon reminded him, with a dry and bitter humour, "and I have a month's pay coming."

Valentine Simmons had not, apparently, heard him. "Two hundred and fifty only," he repeated,

"we always like to accommodate old friends; especially Presbyterian friends."

"I can give you fifty dollars," Gordon told him, at once loud and conciliatory; wondering, at the same time, how, if he did, Clare and himself would manage. He had to pay for his board in Stenton; the doctor for Clare had to be met—fifty cents in hand a visit, or the visits ceased.

"Have your little joke, then get out that hidden stocking, pry up that particular fire brick . . . only two hundred and fifty now . . . but—now."

A hopeless feeling of impotence enveloped Gordon; the small, dry man before him with the pink, bald head shining in the lamplight, the set grin, was as remote from any appeal as an insensate figure cast in metal, a painted iron man in neat grey alpaca, a stiff white shirt with a small blue button and an exact, prim muslin bow.

Still, "I'll give you fifty, and thirty the next month. Why, damn it, I'll pay you off in the year. I'm not going to run away. I have steady work; you know what I am getting; you're safe."

"But"—Valentine Simmons lifted a hand in a round, glistening cuff—"is anything certain in this human vale? Is anything secure that might hang on the swing of a . . . whip?"

With an unaccustomed, violent effort of will Gordon Makimmon suppressed his angry concern at the other's covert allusion: outside his occupation as stage driver he was totally without resources, without the ability to pay for a bag of Green Goose tobacco. The Makimmons had never been thrifty . . . in the beginning they had let their wide share of valley holding grow deep in thicket, where they

might hunt the deer, their streams course through a woven wild where pheasant might feed and fall to their accurate guns.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars," Valentine Simmons repeated pleasantly.

"I haven't got it, and can't get it, all at once," Gordon reiterated in a conciliatory manner. Then his straining, chafing pride, his assaulted self-esteem, overflowed a little his caution. "And you know it," he declared in a loud, ugly voice; "you know the size of every pocketbook in Greenstream; I'll bet, by God, you and old man Hollidew know personal every copper Indian on the pennies of the County."

Valentine Simmons smiled at this conception. Gordon regarded him with hopeless, growing anger: Why, the old screw took that for a compliment!

"This is Wednesday," the storekeeper pronounced; "say, by Saturday . . . the sum I mentioned."

"It can't be done." The last vestiges of Gordon's control were fast melting in the heat of his passion. Simmons turned to the narrow ledger, picking up a pen. "When you bought," he remarked precisely, over his shoulders, "the white shoes and ammunition and silk fishing lines—didn't you intend to pay for them?"

"Yes, I did, and will. And when you said, 'Gordon, help yourself, load up, try those flies;' and 'Never mind the bill now, some other time, old friends pay when they please,' didn't you know I was getting in over my head? didn't you encourage it . . . so you could get judgment on me? sell me out? Though what you settled on me for, what you

see in my ramshackle house and used-up ground, is over me."

Simmons flashed a momentary crafty glance at the other. "Never overlook a location on good water," he advised.

Gordon Makimmon stood speechless, trembling with rage. For a moment Simmons's pen, scratching over the page, made the only sound in the small enclosure; then, "The provident man," he continued, "is always made a target for the abuse of the—the thoughtless. But he usually comes to the assistance of his unfortunate brother. You might arrange a loan."

"Why, so I might," Gordon assented in a thick voice; "I could get it from your provident friend, Hollidew—three hundred dollars, say, at hell's per cent; a little lien on my property. 'Never overlook a situation on good water.'

"By God!" he exclaimed, suddenly prescient, "but I've done for myself."

And he thought of Clare, of Clare fighting eternally that sharp pain in her side, her face now drawn and glistening with the sweat of suffering, now girlishly gay. He thought of her fragile hands, so impotent to cope with the bitter poverty of the mountains. What, with their home, her place of retreat and security, gone, and—it now appeared more than probable—his occupation vanished, would she do?

"I've done for myself, for her," he repeated, subconsciously aloud, in a harsh whisper. He stood rigid, unseeing; a pulse beat visibly in the brown throat by the collarless and faded shirt. Simmons regarded him with a covert gaze; then, catching the

attention of the clerk in the store outside, beckoned slightly with his head. The clerk approached, vigorously brushing the counters with a turkey wing.

Gordon Makimmon's gaze concentrated on the storekeeper. "You're almost an old man," he said, in a slow, unnatural voice; "you have been robbing men and women of their homes for a great many years, and you are still alive. It's surprising that some one has not killed you."

"I have been shot at," Valentine Simmons replied; "behind my back. The men who fail are like that as a rule."

"I'm not like that," Gordon informed him; "it's pretty well known that I stand square in front of the man I'm after. Don't you think, this time, you have made a little mistake? Hadn't I better give you that fifty, and something more later?"

Valentine Simmons rose from his chair and turned, facing Gordon. His muslin bow had slipped awry on the polished, immaculate bosom of his shirt, and it gave him a slightly ridiculous, birdlike expression. He gazed coldly, with his thin lips firm and hands still, into the other's threatening, virulent countenance. "Two hundred and fifty dollars," he insisted.

The thought of Clare, betrayed, persisted in Gordon's mind, battling with his surging temper, his unreasoning resentment. Valentine Simmons stood upright, still, against the lamplight. It was plain that he was not to be intimidated. An overwhelming wave of misery, a dim realization of the disastrous possibilities of his folly, inundated Gordon, drowning all other considerations. He turned and walked abruptly from the office into the store.

There the clerk placed on the counter the bottle, filled and wrapped. In a petty gust of rage, like a jet of steam escaping from a defective boiler, he swept the bottle to the floor, where he ground the splintering fragments of glass, the torn and stained paper, into an untidy blot.

VIII

Outside, the village, the Greenstream Valley, was folded in still, velvety dark. He crossed the street and sat on one of the iron benches placed under the trees on the Court-house lawn. He could see a dull reddish light shining through the dusty window of the *Bugle* office. Shining like that, through his egotistical pride, the facts of his failure and impotence tormented him. It hurt him the more that he had been, simply, diddled, no better than a child in Simmons's astute, practised hands. The latter's rascality was patent, but Simmons could not have been successful unabetted by his own blind negligence. The catastrophe that had overtaken him rankled in his most vulnerable spot —his self-esteem.

He suffered inarticulately, an indistinguishable shape in the soft summer gloom; about his feet, in the lush grass, the greenish-gold sparks of the fire-flies quivered; above the deep rift of the valley the stars were like polished silver coins.

Vaguely, and then more strongly, out of a chaos of vain, sick regrets, his combativeness, his deep-lying, indomitable determination, asserted itself— he would not fall like an over-ripe apple into Simmons's complacent, waiting grasp. But to get, without resources, two hundred and fifty dollars by

Saturday was a preposterous task. Outside his, Clare's, home, he had nothing to sell; and to sell that now, he realized with a spoken oath, would be to throw it away—the vultures, Hollidew and Co., would have heard of his necessity and regulated their action, the local supply of available currency, accordingly.

There was no possible way of earning such a sum in four days; there was little more chance, he realized sardonically, of stealing it. . . . Sometimes large sums of money were won in a night's gambling in the lumber and mining towns over the West Virginia line. But, for that, he should require capital; he should have his wages to-morrow; however, if he gambled with that and lost, Clare and himself would face immediate, irredeemable ruin. He dismissed that consideration from the range of possibilities. But it returned, hovered on the border of his thoughts—he might risk a part of his capital, say thirty dollars. If he lost that, they would be little worse off than they were at present; and if he won . . . he might easily win.

He mentally arranged the details, assuring himself, the while, that he was only toying with the idea. He would pay the customary substitute to drive the stage to Stenton, and cross Cheap Mountain on foot; by dark he would be in Sprucesap, play that night, and return the following day, Friday.

With an effort he still put the scheme from his thoughts, but, although he kept it in abeyance, nothing further occurred to him. That gave him a possible reprieve; all else offered sure disaster. He rose and walked slowly toward his home, revolving, testing, the various aspects of the trip to Sprucesap;

at once deciding upon that venture, and repeating to himself the incontestable fact of its utter folly.

The dark was intense, blue-black, about his dwelling. He struck a match at the edge of the porch, a pointed orange exclamation on the impenetrable gloom. Clare, weary of waiting, had gone to bed; her door was shut, her window tightly closed. The invisible stream gurgled sadly past its banks, the whippoorwills throbbed with ceaseless, insistent passion.

A sudden jumbled vision of the past woven about this dwelling, his home, wheeled through Gordon's mind, scenes happy and unhappy; prevailing want and slim, momentary plenty; his father dead, in his coffin with a stony, pinched countenance, a jaw still unrelaxed above the bright flag that draped his nondescript uniform. Later events followed—his elder, vanished brother bullying him; the brief romance of his sister's courtship; the high, strident voice of his mother, that had always reminded him of her angry red nose—events familiar, sordid, unlovely, but now they seemed all of a piece of desirable, melancholy happiness; they endowed with a hitherto unsuspected value every board of the rough footing of the Makimmon dwelling, every rood of the poor, rocky soil, the weedy grass. He said aloud, in a subdued, jarring voice, "By God, but Simmons won't get it!" But the dreary whippoorwills, the feverish crickets, offered him no confirmation, no assurance.

IX

At noon, on the day following, he stood on the top of Cheap Mountain, gazing back into the deep, verdant cleft of Greenstream. From Cheap the reason for its name was clear—it flowed now direct, now turning, in a vivid green stream along the bases of its mountainous ranges; it flowed tranquil and dark and smooth between banks of tangled saplings, matted, multifarious underbrush, towering, venerable trees. It slipped like a river, bearing upon its balmy surface the promise of asylum, of sleep, of plenty, through the primitive, ruthless forest, which in turn pressed upon it everywhere the menace of its oblivion, its fierce, strangling life.

He saw below him stretches of the steep, rocky trail by which he had mounted with the mounting sun; both had now reached the zenith of their day's journey; from there he would sink into the shadow, the secretiveness, of night. . . . Greenstream village lay twenty-eight miles behind; it was seventeen more to Sprucesap: he hurried forward.

In his pocket rested, not the thirty dollars to which he had limited himself in thought, but his entire month's salary. He might lose all by the lack of a paltry dollar or so.

He was dressed with more care than on the day previous: he wore a dark suit, the coat to which now

swung on a stick over his shoulder, a rubber collar, a tie of orange brocade erected on a superstructure of cardboard; his head was covered by a hard black felt hat, pushed back from his sweating brow, and his trousers hung from a pair of obviously home-knitted yarn suspenders. He shifted the stick from right to left. His revolver dragged chafing against a leg, and he removed it and thrust it into a pocket of the coat.

He followed by turn an old rutted postroad and faint forest trails, and shortened distances by breaking through the trackless underbrush, watching subconsciously for rattlesnakes. The sun slowly declined, its rays fell diagonally, lengthening, through the trees; in a glade the air seemed filled with gold dust; the sky burned in a single flame of apricot. The air, rather than grow dark, appeared to thicken with raw colour, with mauve and ultramarine, silver and cinnabar.

When he arrived at the little deeply-grassed plain that held Sprucesap, it was bathed in a flaring afterglow, a magical floating light. A double row of board structures faced each other across a street of raw clay and narrow wood sidewalks; they were, for the most part, unpainted, hasty erections of a single story. A building labelled "The Steel Spud Hotel" was more pretentious. The others were eating houses, stores with small windows filled with a threatening miscellany—revolvers, leather slung shots and brass knuckles—besides lumbering boots, gaudy Mackinaw jackets, gleaming knives, and ammunition. Beyond the street a single car track ran precariously over the green, and ended abruptly, without roadbed or visible terminus; at one side was

a rude platform, on the other a great pile of bark, rotting from long exposure—the result of some artificial condition of the market, the spite of powerful and vindictive merchants.

A second hotel stood alone, beyond the car tracks, and there Gordon removed the marks of his journey, resettled his collar and the resplendent tie. He felt in his coat for the revolver, in order to transfer it to a more convenient pocket. . . . Its bulk, apparently, evaded his fingers. His search quickened—it had gone! He had lost it somewhere on his long, devious passage of Cheap Mountain. Without it he should be in the power of any spindling gambler who faced a dishonest ace. It would be necessary to procure another weapon before proceeding with his purpose . . . ten dollars, perhaps fifteen; revolvers were highly priced in the turbulent distant wild. Could he afford to lose that amount from his slender store of dollars? Intact, it was absurdly inadequate. He debated the choice—on one hand the peril of gambling unarmed, on the other his desperate need for money. Once more he considered Clare: in the end his arrogance of manhood brought a decision—he would preserve the money for play. He was, he thought insolently of himself, quick as a copperhead snake, and as dangerous. After supper he sat on the porch, twisting and consuming cigarettes, waiting for the night.

X

LARGE kerosene lamps dilated by tin reflectors lit the front of "The Steel Spud." In their radiance he saw the gaily-attired form of a woman. She wore a white hat, with a sweeping white ostrich plume, which hid her face with the exception of a retreating chin and prominent carmine lips; and a fat, unwieldy body was covered by a waist of Scotch plaid silk—lines and squares of black and primary colours—and a short, scant skirt of blue broadcloth that, drawn up by her knees, exposed small feet in white kid and heavy ankles.

Gordon Makimmon paused, and she leaned forward to meet his challenging gaze. "Just in from camp?" she inquired, in a voice hoarse, repellent, conciliatory, and with a mechanical grimace which he identified as a smile. He stopped at the invitation in her tones, and nodded. "And looking for a good time," he further informed her; "perhaps a little game."

"Stop right where you are," she declared. "You've found them both." He mounted to the porch and shook her extended hand, cushioned with fat, and oddly damp and lifeless. He could see her countenance now. It was plaster white with insignificant features and rose like an amorphous column from a swollen throat—a nose like a dab of putty,

eyes obscured by drooping pouchy lids, leaden-hued.

"It's a good thing you seen me," she told him, endeavouring to establish a relationship of easy confidence, "instead of them diseased Mags down the street. Shall we have a little drink upstairs?"

"It's early," he negligently interposed; "how about a turn of the cards first? do you know any one who would take a hand?"

"I got my friend here, and there's a gentleman at the hotel would accommodate us. They're inside." She rose and moved toward the door, waving him to follow. Her slow, clumsy body and chinless, full-lidded head reminded him of a turtle; she gave a still deeper amphibious impression—there was something markedly cold-blooded, inhuman, deleted, in her incongruous, gaudy bulk—an impression of a low, primitive organism, the subtle smell of primal mud.

"Jake!" she called at the entrance to the crude hotel office; "Jake! Mr. Ottinger! here's a gentleman wants a little game."

Two men hastily rose and advanced toward the door. The first, Jake, was small, with the narrow, high shoulders, the long, pale face, the long, pale hands, of a cripple. The other, a young man with a sodden countenance discoloured by old purplish bruises, wore a misfitting suit that drew across heavy, bowed shoulders, thick, powerful arms. He regarded Gordon Makimmon with no light dawning upon his lowering face; no greeting disturbed the dark, hard line of his mouth. But the other, with an apparently hearty, stereotyped flow of words,

applauded Gordon's design, approved his qualities of sportsmanship, courage.

"Give me the man from the woods for an open-handed sport," he vociferated; "he ain't a fool neither, he's wise to the time of night. The city crowd, the wise ones, are the real ringside marks."

"Come up to my room," the woman directed from the foot of a stairway, "where no amateur John Condons will tell us how to play our cards. I got some good liquor, too."

In her room she lit a small lamp, which proved insufficient, and Mr. Ottinger brought a second from his quarters. Gordon found himself in a long, narrow chamber furnished with two wooden beds, two identical, insecure bureaus, stands with wash basins and pitchers, and a table. The floor, the walls, the ceiling, were resinous yellow pine, and gave out a hot dry smell from which there was no escape but the door, for the room was without other outlet.

A preliminary drink was indispensable; and, served in two glasses and a cracked toothbrush mug —Mr. Ottinger elected to imbibe his "straight" from the bottle—it was drunk with mutual assurances of tender regard. "Happy days," the woman pronounced. Only three chairs were available, and after some shuffling, appropriate references to "honest and plain" country accommodations, the table was ranged by a bed on which Em—"Call me Em," she had invited Gordon; "let's be real homelike,"—seated herself.

The smaller man ostentatiously broke the seal from a new pack of cards, dexterously spreading them across the table. His hands, Gordon saw, were extraordinarily supple, and emanated a sickly

odour of glycerine. His companion's were huge and misshapen, but they, too, were surprisingly deft, quick.

"What'll it be?" Jake demanded; "jackpots; stud; straight draw——"

"Hell, let's throw cold hands," Mr. Ottinger interrupted; "chop the trimmings. We're here for the stuff, ain't we?" He was immediately reprehended for his brusque, unsociable manner.

"He's got the idea, though," Gordon approved; "we're here for the stuff." It was finally arranged that poker hands should be dealt, a draw allowed, and the cards shown, the highest cards to take the visible money. "A dollar a go?" Jake queried, cutting for the deal. On the bed by the woman's side was a tarnished silver bag, with an ornate, meretricious clasp; her two companions produced casual rolls of paper money; and Gordon detached five dollars from the slender amount of his wage, his paramount capital. On a washstand, within easy reach, stood the bottle of whisky, flanked by the motley array of drinking vessels.

Gordon Makimmon's five dollars vanished in as many minutes. Oppressed by consuming anxiety, he could scarcely breathe in the close, stale air. Em gambled with an affectation of careless indifference; she asked in an off-hand manner for cards, paid her losses with a loud laugh. Jake invariably gave one rapid glance at his hand, and then threw it down upon the table without separating his discard. Mr. Ottinger, it was plain, was superstitious—he edged his hand open by imperceptible degrees until the denominations of the cards were visible, then hurriedly closed them from sight; often he didn't

look at his draw until all the hands were exposed. He wrinkled his face in painful efforts of concentration, protruded a thick and unsavoury tongue. At the loose corners of Jake's mouth flecks of saliva gathered whitely; in the fleering light of the kerosene the shadows on his face were cobalt. The woman's face shone with drops of perspiration that formed slowly and rolled like a flash over her plastered skin.

Another round of drinks was negotiated, adding to the fiery discomfort of the sealed room, of the dry, dead atmosphere. Gordon won back his five dollars, and gained five more. "Let's make it two a throw," the woman proposed. The thickset young man remuttered the period that they were there for the stuff. "Otty will have his little joke," she proclaimed.

"It's not funny," he protested seriously.

"Two?" Jake demanded of Gordon. The latter nodded.

XI

LATE in the night they were still playing without a change in their positions. Em still perspired; but Mr. Ottinger no longer protruded his tongue, a sullen anger was evident in his every move; Jake's affable flow of conversation was hushed; Gordon's face set. It was, indisputably, not funny —he had won nearly two hundred dollars. "Make it ten?" Jake queried. The others nodded. Now Gordon had two hundred and twenty dollars; an extraordinary, overwhelming luck presided over his cards, he won more frequently than the other three together. A tense silence enveloped the latter: they shuffled, demanded cards, threw down their hands, in a hurried, disorganized fashion. They glanced, each at the other, swiftly; it was evident that a common idea, other than the game, possessed them. Jake hovered a breath longer than necessary over the bottle, then pressed a drink upon Gordon. He refused; this, he recognized, was not a time for dissipation; he needed every faculty.

Two hundred and sixty dollars. The air of suppression, of tension, increased. Gordon's only concern now was to get away, to take the money with him.

Em shuffled in a slipshod, inattentive manner;

Mr. Ottinger opened his hand boldly, faced his bad luck with a stony eye; Jake laboured under a painful excitement, obviously not connected with his losses; his long, waxy fingers quivered, a feverish point of fire flickered in either cadaverous cheek; his eyes glowed between hollow, sunken temples. "Four," he demanded, with shaking lips. Mr. Ottinger rapped out a request for one. "I'm satisfied," Gordon said.

"Don't that sucker beat hell!" Em declared, the solicitous manner that, earlier in the evening, had marked her manner toward Gordon carelessly discarded. "I'm taking three." A sudden, visible boredom fell upon her as she glanced at her filled hand. "Leave us double it," she remarked. Gordon nodded, and she threw her hand upon the table; it held four nines. She reached her fat, chalky arm toward the money, but Gordon was before her. "Four queens," he shot out, grasping the crumpled bills.

Em cursed; then followed a short, awkward silence. It was Ottinger's deal, but he did not pick up the scattered cards. Gordon gathered himself alertly, measuring the distance to the door. "I've got enough," he remarked; "I'm going to quit."

"You got enough, all right," Em agreed. "Now, how'd you like to have a real good time?" She disposed herself upon her elbow, so that the sagging bulk of her body was emphasized through its straining apparel; one leg, incredible, leviathan, was largely visible.

"I've had enough," Gordon repeated; "I'll be moving."

Em rose quickly, losing her air of coquetry.

Gordon was facing the men, and was unprepared for the heavy blow she dealt upon the back of his neck. "Hang it on him, Otty!" she cried excitedly.

Mr. Ottinger shoved the card table from his path. It was now evident that it was, precisely, to "hang it on" whoever might be elected for that delicate attention that formed Otty's purpose, profession, preoccupation, in life. He was, for a heavy man, active; and, before Gordon Makimmon could put out a protective arm, he returned the latter to the perpendicular with a jarring blow on the chin. Jake whipped out from a place of concealment on his person a plaited leather weapon with a globular end.

It was Jake, Gordon instinctively knew, who threatened him most; he could easily stop the hulking shape before him. He regained his poise, and returned blow for blow with Mr. Ottinger; neither man guarded—each was solely intent upon marking, crippling, the other. A chair fell, sliding across the floor; a washstand collapsed with a splintering crash of china, a miniature flood. Em stood on the outskirts of the conflict, armed with the whisky bottle; Jake crouched watchful with the leather club. Gordon cut his opponent's face with short, vicious jabs; he was, as customary, cold—he saw clearly where every blow fell; he saw Otty's nose grotesquely shapeless and blackened; he felt Otty's teeth cut the skin of his knuckles and break off; he heard his involuntary gasp as he struck him a hammer-like blow over the heart.

Mr. Ottinger, in return, hit him frequently and with effect. Gordon was conscious of a warm, gummy tide spreading over his face, he saw with

difficulty through rapidly closing eyes. " For Cri's sake," Otty gasped, " get to him; the town'll be on us."

Em made an ineffectual lunge with the bottle. Gordon swung the point of his elbow into her side, and she sat on the bed with a " G-G-God !" Jake hit him with the club on the shoulder blade; numbness radiated from the struck point; there was a loss of power in the corresponding arm. Jake hit him again, and a stabbing pain entered his side and stayed apparently tangled in splintered bone. He paused for a moment, and all three fell upon him, beating, clubbing, kicking. He fought on, now rapidly losing power. The woman threw herself on his back, forced him to his knees. " Won't none of you do for him ?" she complained hysterically. She pressed his head into her breast, and Mr. Ottinger hit him below and just back of his ear. Gordon slipped out full length on the floor.

He was waveringly conscious, but he had lost all interest, all sense of personal connection, with the proceedings. He dully watched Ottinger draw back, tenderly fingering his damaged features; he saw Em breathing stormily, empurpled. Jake, with the crimson flames in his long, pallid mask, the white saliva flecking his jaw, hung over him with a glassy, intent stare.

" Get the stuff," the practical Ottinger urged; " it's the stuff we're after. Don't go bug again."

" Jake don't hear you," Em told him; " he's off. I'm glad the fella's going to be fixed—he jolted me something fierce."

Jake swung the little flexuous club softly against his palm, and Gordon suddenly realized that the

cripple intended to kill him.—That was the lust which transfigured the gambler's countenance, which lit the fires in the deathly cheeks, set the long fingers shaking. Gordon considered the idea, and, obscurely, it troubled him, moved him a space from his apathy. Instinctively, in response to a sudden movement of the figure above him, he drew his arm up in front of his head; and an intolerable pain shot up through his shoulder and flared, blindingly, in his eyes. It pierced his indifference, set in motion his reason, his memory; he realized the necessity, the danger, of his predicament . . . the money!—he must guard it, take it back with him. Above, in a heated orange mist, the woman's face loomed blank and inhuman; farther back Mr. Ottinger's features were indistinctly visible.

He must rise. . . .

His groping hand caught hold of the rung of the chair, and, with herculean labour, he turned and raised himself a fraction from the floor. Jake directed a hasty blow at his head that missed him altogether. His other hand caught the chair, and he dragged himself dizzily into a kneeling posture. A sudden change swept over the three above him.

"Nail him where he is!" Em cried excitedly; "he's getting up on you." Gordon's hands moved uncertainly upward on the chair; his knees rose from the floor. A shower of blows fell on him; the woman beat him with her pudgy fists; Mr. Ottinger was kicking at him; Jake was weeping, and endeavouring to get room in which to swing his club.

Gordon had one foot on the floor.

"Give me a chance at him," Jake implored; "give me a chance. God, if I had a knife!"

If they took away the chair, Gordon knew, he was lost. He clung to it; pressed his breast against it; crept upward by means of it, slowly, slowly, through a storm of battering hands. It seemed to him that, in rising, he was shouldering aside the entire weight, the forces, of a universe bent on his destruction, against which he was determined to prevail. It was as though his will, the vitality which animated him, which was his soul, stood aside from his beaten and suffering body, and, with a cold, a cruel, detachment, commanded it upright.

The woman's bulk got in Jake's way, and he struck her across the eyes with the back of his hand, consigning her to eternal hell. Mr. Ottinger, confused by the irregularity of the turmoil, worked inefficiently, swinging at random his hard fists, kicking impartially.

Gordon now had both feet upon the floor; he straightened up. For a breath the three stood motionless, livid; and in that instant his hand fell upon the door knob, he staggered back into the hall, carrying with him a vision of his brocaded tie lying upon the floor.

XII

He stumbled hastily down the stairway and found the narrow porch, the serene enveloping night; down the street, lamps made blots of brightness, but, beyond, the obscurity was profound, unbroken. Wave after wave of nausea swept over him; he clung to a porch support with cold sweat starting through the blood that smeared his countenance, stiffened in his shirt, that was warm upon his side.

The sound of footfalls, sharp, repressed voices from above, stirred him into a fresh realization of his precarious position. The gamblers would follow him, rob him with impunity in the shadows of Sprucesap's lawless street, drag him behind the angle of a building, where Jake would have ample scope for the swinging of his leathered lead. . . .

He lurched down to the street and silently merged into the awaiting night.

At dawn he appeared from a thicket, a mile beyond Sprucesap on the road to Greenstream, and negotiated successfully a ride on a load of fragrant upland hay to a point within a few miles of his destination. His coat, soiled and torn, was buttoned across a bare throat, for his shirt had been ripped into bandages; his face, apparently, had been harrowed for a red planting; he moved awkwardly,

breathed with a gasp from a stabbing pain in the side . . . but he moved, breathed. He drank with long delight from a sparkling spring. He had the money, two hundred and eighty dollars, safely in his pocket.

XIII

The afternoon was waning when he gazed again into the deep sombrous rift of Greenstream: from where Gordon stood, on the heights, in the flooding sun, it appeared to be already evening below. As he descended the mountainside the cool shadows rose about him, enveloping him in the quietude, the sense of security, which brooded over the withdrawn valley—the resplendent mirage of Nature kind, beneficent, the illusion of Nature as a tender and loving parent . . . of Nature, as imminent, as automatic, as a landslip crushing a path to the far, secret resting place of its destiny.

Dr. Pelliter's light carriage with its pair of weedy young horses stood hitched by the road above the Makimmon dwelling; and, on entering the house, Gordon found Clare in bed and Pelliter seated at her side. A gaily-patched quilt hid all but her head. She smiled at Gordon through her pale mask of suffering; but her greeting turned to swift concern at his battered countenance. "An accident," he explained impatiently.

The doctor greeted him seriously. He had, Gordon knew, a sovereign and inevitable remedy for all the ills of the flesh—pain, he argued, and disease were inseparable. Subdue the first, and the latter ceased to exist as an active ill; and a dexterously

wielded hypodermic needle left behind him a trail of narcotized and relieved sufferers. Bottles of patent medicines, exhilarating or numbing as the purchaser might require, lined the shelves of his drug store.

But now his customary soothing smile was absent, the small, worn case that contained the glittering syringe and minute bottles filled with white or vivid yellow pellets was not to be seen.

"Clare here's gone and got herself real miserable," he stated, rising and beckoning Gordon to follow him to the porch. "She's bad," he pronounced outside; "that pain's got the best of her, and it's getting the best of me. She ought to be cut, but she's so weak, it's gone so long, that I'm kind of slow about opening her. And the truth is, Gordon, if I was successful she wouldn't have a chance of getting well here—it'll take expert nursing, awful nice food; and then, at the shortest, she would be in bed a couple of months. She ought to go to the hospital in Stenton. That's the real truth. I'm telling you the facts, Gordon; we can't handle her here—she'd die on us."

Gordon only half comprehended the other's words —Clare dangerously ill . . . a question of dying, hospitals. She had suffered for so long that, without losing his sympathy for her, it had seemed to him her inevitable condition. It had fallen naturally upon him to care for her, guard her against damp, prevent her from lifting objects beyond her strength. These continual small attentions held an important place in his existence—he thought about her in a mind devoted substantially to himself, and it brought him a glow of contentment, a pleasant feel-

ing of ministration and importance. It had not occurred to him that Clare might grow worse, that she might, in fact, die. The idea filled him with sudden dismay. His heart contracted with a sharp hurt. "The hospital," he echoed dully, "Stenton."

"By rights," the doctor iterated; "of course we'll do what we can here—she might last for a couple of years more without cutting; and then, again, her heart might just quit. Still——"

"What would the hospital cost?" Gordon asked, almost unaware of having pronounced the words.

"It'd be dear—two hundred and some dollars anyway, and the money on the nail. The nursing would count up; then there would be something for operating, if it was only a little . . . a lot of things you don't allow for would turn up."

Two hundred and more dollars! Gordon had a fleeting vision, against the empurpling banks, the dark, sliding water, and the mountainous wall capped with dissolving gold beyond, of a room filled with the hot glow of kerosene lamps; he saw Jake's twitching, murderous countenance above him. . . . Two hundred dollars! He had two hundred and eighty dollars in his pocket. He had another vision —of Simmons; it was two hundred and fifty dollars that the latter wanted, must have, to-morrow. But Simmons swiftly faded before Clare's need, the pressure of sickness.

"She couldn't go down in the stage," he muttered; "the shaking would kill her before ever she got there."

"I'll drive her to Stenton, Gordon," the doctor volunteered, "if you've got the money handy."

"I've got her," Gordon Makimmon declared grimly.

"I'll take her right to the hospital and give her to the doctor in charge. Everything will be done for her comfort. She has an elegant chance of pulling through, there. And you can see her when you go down with the stage——" Pelliter suddenly stopped; he appeared disconcerted by what he had said.

"Well," Gordon demanded, his attention held by the other's manner, "can't I?"

"You were away from Greenstream yesterday and to-day," the doctor replied evasively, "you didn't hear . . . oh, there's nothing in it if you didn't. I heard that Simmons had had you taken off the stage. Did you have trouble with Buckley, cut him with a whip? Buck has been blowing about showing you a thing or two."

A feeling of angry dismay enveloped Gordon. He had recognized, obscurely, that Simmons and old man Hollidew dominated the community, but he had never before come in actual contact with their arbitrary power, he had never before been faced by the overmastering weapon of their material possessions, the sheer weight of their wealth. It stirred him to revolt, elemental and bitter; every instinct rose against the despotic power which threatened to overwhelm him.

"By God!" he exclaimed, "but they will find that I'm no sheep to drive into their lot and shear!"

"Now, about Clare," the doctor interposed.

"When will you come for her?" Gordon inquired. He took from his pocket the roll of money he had

won at Sprucesap, and counted two hundred dollars, which he tended to the doctor.

"To-morrow, about seven. Everything will be done for her, Gordon. I reckon that's only an empty splash about the stage."

The dusk had thickened in Clare's room; he could scarcely distinguish her face, white against the darkened squares of the quilt. "Whoever will get your supper?" she worried, when he had told her; "and the cow'll need bedding, and those cheeses brought in off the roof, and——"

He closed her mouth with a gentle palm. "I've done 'em all a hundred times," he declared. "We're going to get you right, this spell, Clare," he proclaimed; "you'll get professional, real stylish care at Stenton."

She rose, trembling, on her arms. "Are they going to cut at me?" she asked.

The lie on his lips perished silently before her grave tones. "It's not rightly a dangerous operation," he protested; "thousands come out of it every year."

"Gordon, I'm afeared of it."

"No, you're not, Clare Makimmon; there's not a drop of fear in you."

"It's not just death I'm afeared of, it's—oh, you will never understand for being a man." Her voice lowered instinctively. "Somehow I hate the thought of those strange men hacking and spoiling my body. That's just foolishness, I know, and my time's pretty well gone for foolishness. I've always sort of tended my body, Gordon, and kept it white and soft. I thought if a man asked me in spite of—well, my face, he could take pride in me under-

neath. But that's all done with; I ought to be glad for the . . . Gordon!" she exclaimed more energetically, "it will cost a heap of money; how will you get it? Don't borrow."

"I got it," he interrupted her tersely, "and I didn't borrow it, neither."

XIV

He woke at dawn. The whippoorwills, the frogs and crickets, were silent, and the sharp, sweet song of a mocking bird throbbed from a hedge. It was dark in the valley, but, high above, the air was already brightening with the sun; a symmetrical cloud caught the solar rays and flushed rosy against silver space. The valley turned from indistinct blue to grey, to sparkling green. The sun gilded the peaks of the western range, and slipped slowly down, spilling into the depth. It was almost cold, the pump handle, the rough sward, the foliage beyond, were drenched with white dew; a damp, misty veil lifted from the surface of the stream.

Clare declared that she felt stronger; she dressed, insisted upon frying his breakfast. "You ought to have somebody in," she asserted later. They were on the shallow porch, waiting stiffly for the doctor. "But don't get that eldest of your sister's; last time she wore my sateen waist and run the colours."

Just as she was leaving he slipped twenty dollars into her hand. "Write when you want more," he directed; "and I'll be down to see you . . . yes, often . . . the stage." A leaden depression settled over him as the doctor's carriage took her from sight. The house to which he turned was deserted, lonely. He locked the door to her room.

XV

One of the canvas-covered mountain wagons was unloading on the platform before Simmons's store when Gordon entered the centre of the village. A miscellaneous pile of merchandise was growing, presided over by a clerk with a pencil and tally book. Valentine Simmons, without his coat, in an immaculate starched white waistcoat, stood upon one side.

Gordon, without delay, approached him. "I can give you a hundred dollars," he informed the other, exhibiting that sum.

"Two hundred and fifty will be necessary," Simmons informed him concisely, "to-day."

"Come to reason——"

Valentine Simmons turned his back squarely upon him. A realization of the uselessness of further words possessed Gordon; he returned the money to his pocket. The contemptuous neglect of the other lit the ever-trimmed lamp of his temper. "What's this," he demanded, "I hear about driving stage ? about Buck boasting around that he had had me laid off ?"

"That's not correct," Simmons informed him smoothly; "Buckley has no power to do that . . . the owners of the privilege decided that you were too unreliable."

"Then it's true," Gordon interrupted him, "I'm off?" Simmons nodded. Gordon's temper swelled and flared whitely before his vision; rage possessed him utterly; without balance, check, he was no more than an insensate force in the grip of his mastering passion. He would stop that miserable black heart for ever. Old Valentine Simmons's lips tightened, his fingers twitched; he turned his back deliberately upon Gordon. The metal buckle which held the strap of his waistcoat caught the sun and reflected it into Gordon's eyes. "How many gross pink celluloid rattles?" the storekeeper demanded of the clerk.

Gordon Makimmon's hand crept toward his pocket . . . then he remembered—he had lost that which he sought . . . on the side of Cheap Mountain. If Simmons would turn, say something further, taunt him, he would kill him with his hands. But Simmons did none of these things; instead he walked slowly, unharmed, into the store.

XVI

Gordon had intended to avoid the vicinity of the Courthouse on the day of the sale of his home, but an intangible attraction held him in its neighbourhood. He sat by the door to the office of the *Greenstream Bugle*, diagonally across the street. Within, the week's edition was going to press; a burly young individual was turning the cylinders by hand, while the editor and owner dexterously removed the printed sheets from the press. The office was indescribably grimy; the rude ceiling was hung with dusty cobwebs, the windows obscured by a grey film. A small footpress stood to the left of the entrance; on the right were ranged typesetters' cases with high, precarious stools, a handpress for proof, and a table to hold the leaded forms. These, with the larger press, an air-tight sheet iron stove, and some nondescript chairs, completed the office furnishings. Over all hung the smell of mingled grease, ink, and damp paper, flat and penetrating.

Without, the sun shone ardently; it cast a rich pattern of light and shade on the Courthouse lawn and the small assemblage of merely idle or interested persons gathered for the sale. The sheriff stood facing them under the towering pillars of the portico; his voice rang clearly through the air. To

Gordon the occasion, the loud sing-song of the sheriff, appeared unreal, dreamlike; he listened incredulously to the meagre cataloguing of his dwelling, the scant acreage, with an innate sense of outrage, of a shameful violation of his privacy. He was still unable to realize that his home and his father's, the clearing that his grandfather had cut from the wild, was actually passing from his possession. He summoned in vain the emotions which, he told himself, were appropriate. The profound discouragement within him would not be lifted to emotional heights: lassitude settled over him like a fog.

The bidding began in scattered, desultory fashion, mounting slowly by hundreds. Eighteen hundred dollars was offered, and there the price obstinately hung.

The owner of the *Bugle* appeared at his door and nodded mysteriously to Gordon, who rose and listlessly obeyed the summons. The other closed the door with great care and lowered a faded and torn shade over the front window. Then he retired to a small space divided from the body of the office by a curtain suspended from a sagging wire. He brought his face close to Gordon's ear. "Have a nip?" he asked in a solemn, guarded fashion. Gordon assented.

A bottle was produced from a cupboard and, together with a tin cup, handed to him.

"Luck," he pronounced half-heartedly, raising the cup to his lips. When the other had gone through a similar proceeding the process was carefully reversed—the bottle was returned to the cupboard, the tin cup suspended upon its hook, the

steps retraced, and the curtain once more coaxed up, the door thrown open.

The group on the Courthouse lawn were stringing away; on the steps the sheriff was conversing with Valentine Simmons's brother, a drab individual who performed the store-keeper's public services and errands. The sale had been consummated. The long, loose-jointed dwelling accumulated by successive generations of Makimmons had passed out of their possession.

A poignant feeling of loss flashed through Gordon's apathy; suddenly his eyes burned, and an involuntary sharp inspiration resembled a gasp, a sob. A shadow ran over the earth. The owner of the *Bugle* stepped out and gazed upward. At the sight of the soft grey clouds assembling above, an expression of determined purpose settled upon his dark countenance. He hurried into the office, and reappeared a few minutes later, a peaked corduroy hat drawn over his eyes, a piece of pasteboard in one hand, and, under his arm, a long slender bundle folded in black muslin. The pasteboard he affixed to the door; it said, "Gone fishing. Back tomorrow."

XVII

Minus certain costs and the amount of his indebtedness to Valentine Simmons, Gordon received the sum of one thousand and sixty dollars for the sale of his house. He was still sleeping in it, but the day was near when he must vacate. The greater part of his effects was gathered under a canvas cover on the porch. Clare's personal belongings were still untouched in her room. He must wait for the disposition of those until he had learned the result of the operation.

He heard from Clare on an evening when he was sitting on his lonely porch, twisting his dexterous cigarettes and brooding darkly on the mischances that had overtaken him of late. It was hot and steamy in the valley, no stars were visible; the known world, muffled in a close and imponderable cloak, was without any sign of life, of motion, of variety. Gordon heard footsteps descending heavily from the road; a bulky shape loomed up before him and disclosed the features of Dr. Pelliter.

He greeted Gordon awkwardly, and then fell momentarily silent. "She sent you a message, Gordon," he pronounced at last.

"Clare's dead," Gordon replied involuntarily. So far away, he thought, and alone. . . . He must go at once and fetch her home. He rose.

"Clare said," the doctor continued, "if your sister's eldest was to come in, to give her the sateen waist." An extended silence fell upon the men; the whippoorwills sobbed and sobbed; the stream gurgled past its banks. Then:

"By God!" Gordon said passionately, "I don't know but I'm not glad Clare's gone—Simmons has got our house, I'm not driving stage . . . Clare would have sorrowed herself out of living. Life's no jig tune."

The doctor went. Gordon continued to sit on the porch; at intervals he mechanically rolled and lit cigarettes, which glowed for a moment and went out, unsmoked. The feeling of depression that had cloaked him during the few days past changed imperceptibly to one of callous indifference toward existence in general. The seeds of revolt, of instability, which Clare and a measure of worldly position, of pressure, had held in abeyance, germinated in his disorganized mind, his bitter sense of injustice and injury. He hardened, grew defiant . . . the strain of lawlessness brought so many years before from warring Scotch highlands rose bright and troublesome in him.

XVIII

Clare's body was brought back to Greenstream on the following day. His sister and her numerous brood descended solicitously upon Gordon later; neighbours, kindly and officious, arrived . . . Clare was laid out. There were sibilant whispered conversations about a mislaid petticoat with a mechlin hem; drawers were searched and the missing garment triumphantly unearthed; silk mitts were discussed, discarded; the white shoes—real buck and a topnotch article—forced on. At last Clare was exhibited in the room that had been hers. There was no place in the Makimmon dwelling for general assemblage but the kitchen, and it had been pointed out by certain delicate souls that the body and the preparations for the funeral repast would accord but doubtfully. Besides, the kitchen was too hot.

Clare's peaked, blue-white countenance was withdrawn and strange above a familiar harsh black silk dress; her hands, folded upon her flat breast, lay in a doubled attitude dreadfully impossible to life. A thin locket of gold hung on a chain about her still throat. The odour of June roses that filled the corners, a subdued red riot of the summer, the sun without, was overpowering.

As the hour appointed for the funeral approached,

a gratifying number of people assembled: the women clustered about the porch, hovered about the door which opened upon the remains; the men gathered in a group above the stream, lingered by the fence. A row of dusty hooded vehicles, rough-coated, intelligent horses, were hitched above.

The minister took his station by a table on which a glass of water had been placed upon a vivid red cover: he portentously cleared his throat. "The Lord giveth," he began. . . . It was noon, pellucidly clear, still, hot; the foliage on the mountain-sides was like solid walls of greenery rising to a canopy, a veil, of azure. Partridges whistled clear and flutelike from a cover near by; the stream flashed in the sun, mirroring on its unwrinkled surface the stiff, sombre figures gathered for the funeral.

The droning voice of the preacher drew out interminably through the sultry golden hour. Women sniffed sharply, dabbled with toil-hardened hands at their eyes; the men, standing in the grass, shuffled their feet uneasily. "Let us pray." The speaker dropped upon his knees, and his voice rose, grew more insistent, shrill with a touch of hysteria. From the back of the house a hen clucked in an excited, aggrieved manner.

Gordon Makimmon stood at the end of the porch, morosely ill at ease: the memories of Clare as a girl, as a woman going about and performing the duties of their home, the dignity of his sense of loss and sorrow, had vanished before this public ceremony; they had sunk to perfunctory, conventional emotions before the glib flood of the paid eulogist, the facile emotion of the women.

Suddenly he saw, partially hidden by the dull

dresses of the older women, a white ruffled skirt, the turn of a young shoulder, a drooping straw hat. A meagre intervening form moved, and he saw that Lettice Hollidew had come to his sister's funeral. He wondered, in a momentary instinctive resentment, what had brought her among this largely negligent gathering. She had barely known Clare; Gordon was not certain that she had ever been in their house. He could see her plainly now—she stood clasping white gloves with firm pink hands; her gaze was lowered upon the uneven flooring of the porch. He could see the soft contour of her chin, a shimmer of warm brown hair. She was crisply fresh, incredibly young in the group of gaunt, worn forms; her ruffled fairness was an affront to the thin, rigid shoulders in rusty black, the sallow, deeply-bitten faces of the other women.

She looked up and surprised his intent gaze: she flushed slightly, the gloves were twisted into a knot, but her eyes were unwavering—they held an appeal to his understanding, his sympathy, not to be mistaken. It was evident that that gaze cost her an effort. She was, Gordon remembered, a diffident girl. His resentment evaporated. . . . He speculated upon her reason for coming; and, speculating, involuntarily stood more erect. With a swift, surreptitious motion he straightened his necktie.

The Greenstream cemetery lay aslant on a rise above the village. From the side of the raw yellow clay hole into which they lowered the coffin Gordon could see, beyond the black form of the minister, over the rows of uneven roofs, the bulk of the Courthouse, the sweep of the valley, glowing with multifarious vitality.

"Dust to dust," said the minister; "ashes to ashes," in the midst of the warm, the resplendent, the palpitating day. One of Gordon's nephews—a shock of tow hair rising rebellious against an application of soap, stubby, scarred hands, shoes obviously come by in their descent from more mature extremities—who had been audibly snuffling for the past ten minutes, burst into a lugubrious, frightened wail. Through the solemn, appointed periods of the minister cut the sibilant, maternal promise of a famous "whopping."

XIX

Gordon thought again of Lettice Hollidew as he was sitting for the last evening on the porch of the dwelling that had passed out of his hands. Twilight had poured through the valley, thickening beneath the trees, over the stream; the mountain ranges were dark, dusty blue against a maroon sky. He recalled the sympathy, the plea for comprehension, in Lettice's gaze, lifted, for the first time, frankly against his own.

Hers was not the feminine type which attracted him; he preferred a more flamboyant beauty, ready repartee, the conscious presence and employment of the lure of sex. His taste had been fed by the paid women of Stenton, the few blowsy, loose females of the mountains; these and the surface chatter of the stage, and Clare, formed his sole knowledge, experience, surmising, of women. He recalled Lettice condescendingly; she did not stir his pulses, appeal to his imagination. Yet she moved his pride, his inordinate self-esteem. It had been on his account, and not Clare's, that she had come to the funeral. The little affair with Buckley Simmons had captured her attention and interest; he had not thought Lettice so impressionable.

It was, he remembered, Wednesday night—there would be prayer-meeting in the Methodist Church;

the Hollidews were Methodists; women, mostly, attended prayer-meeting. If he strolled about in that vicinity he might see Lettice at the close of the service, thank her for attending poor Clare's funeral.

He rose and negligently made his way through the soft gloom past the Courthouse to the Methodist Church. The double doors were open, and a flood of hot radiance rolled out into the night, together with the familiar tones of old Martin Seger loudly importuning his invisible, inscrutable Maker. There were no houses opposite the church, and, balanced obscurely on the fence of split rails against the unrelieved night, a row of young men smoked redly glowing cigarettes; while, on the ground below them, shone the lanterns by the aid of which they escorted the various maidens of their choice on their various obscure ways.

The prayer stopped abruptly, and, after a momentary silence, the dolorous wail of a small organ abetted a stridulent concourse of human voices lifted in lamentable song, a song in which they were desirous of being winged like the dove.

The sound mounted in a grievous minor into the profound stillness, the peace, of the valley, of the garment of stars drawn from wall to wall. There was something animal-like in its long-drawn, quavering note—like the baying of a dog, out of the midst of his troubled darkness, at the remote silver serenity, the disturbing, effortless splendour, of the moon.

The line of figures without, sitting on the fence with their feet caught under the second rail, smoked in imperturbable masculine indifference. There was, shortly, a stir within, a moving blur of figures

in the opened doors, and the lanterns swung alertly to the foot of the steps, where, one by one, the bobbing lights, detached from the constellation, vanished into the night.

Almost immediately Gordon saw Lettice Hollidew standing at the entrance, awaiting a conversing group of older women at the head of the aisle. She recognized him and descended immediately with a faint, questioning smile. The smile vanished as she greeted him; her eyes were dark on a pale, still countenance. He noticed that she was without the heady perfume which stirred him as the other girls passed, and he was silently critical of the omission.

He delivered quickly, with a covert glance above, the customary period about seeing her home. Immediately she walked with him into the obscurity, the mystery, of the night.

"It was certainly nice-hearted of you to come to Clare's funeral," he began.

Close beside him she shivered, it might be at the memory of that occasion. She was without a hat, and he was able to study her profile: it was irregular, with a low, girlish brow and a nose too heavy for beauty; she had a full under lip and a strongly modelled chin, a firm line ending in a generous throat, milk-white in the gloom. Her figure too, he judged, was too heavy for his standard of feminine charm. His interest in her burned low, sustained only by what he recognized as a conquest.

She walked slowly and more slowly as he dallied by her side. Almost subconsciously he adopted the tone by which he endeavoured to enlist the interest of the opposite sex: he repeated in a perfunctory

manner the stereotyped remarks appropriate for such occasions.

She listened intently, with sudden little glances from a momentarily lifted gaze. He grew impatient at the absence of the flattering responses to which he was largely accustomed. And, dropping abruptly his artificial courtesy, he maintained a sullen silence, quickened his stride. He drew some satisfaction from the observation that his reticence hurt her. Her hands caught and strained together; she looked at him with a longer, questioning gaze.

"I wanted to tell you," she said finally, with palpable difficulty, "how sorry I am about . . . about things; your home, and—and I heard of the stage, too. It was a shame; you drove beautifully, and took such care of the passengers."

"It was that care cost me the place," he answered with brutal directness; "old Simmons did it; him and his precious Buckley."

She stopped with an expression of instantly deep concern. "Oh! I am so sorry . . . then it was my fault. But it's horrid that they should have done that; that they should be able; it is all wrong——"

"Right nor wrong don't make any figure I've ever discovered," he retorted; "Valentine Simmons has the power, he's got the money. That's it—money's the right of things; it took my house away from me, like it's taken away so many houses, so many farms, in Greenstream——"

"But," she objected timidly, "didn't they owe Mr. Simmons for things? You see, people borrow, borrow, borrow, and never pay back. My father,"

she proceeded with more confusion, " has lost lots of money in that way."

" I can tell you all about that," he informed her bitterly, proceeding to mimic Simmons's dry, cordial tones. " ' Take the goods right along with you; pay when you like; no hurry between old friends.' Then, when Zebener Hull's corn failed, ' I'll trouble you for that amount,' the skinflint says, and sells Zebener out. And what your father's lost," he added more directly still, " wouldn't take you on the stage to Stenton. Your father and Simmons have got about everything worth getting in the county; they've got the money, they've got the land, they've got the men right in their iron safes. Right and wrong!" he sneered; " it's money——"

" Oh! please," she begged, " please don't be so unhappy, so hard. Life isn't as dreadful as that."

" It's worse," he declared sombrely. They turned by Simmons's store, but continued in the opposite direction from the one-time Makimmon dwelling. They passed a hedge of roses; the perfume hung heavy-sweet, poignant; there was apparently no sky, no earth, only a close purple envelopment, imminent, palpable, lying languidly, unstirring, in a space without form or limit and of one colour.

Lettice walked silently by his side; he could hear her breathing, irregular, quick. She was very close to him, then moved suddenly, consciously, away; but, almost immediately, she drifted back, brushing his shoulder; it seemed that she returned inevitably, blindly; in the gloom her gown fluttered like the soft white wings of a moth against him.

" It's worse," he repeated, his voice loud and harsh, like a discordant bell clashing in the sostenuto

passage of a symphony; "but it's all one to me —there's nothing else they can take; I'm free, free to sleep or wake, to be drunk when I like with no responsibility to Simmons or any one else——"

Her breathing increasingly grew laboured, oppressed; a little sob escaped, softly miserable. She was crying. He was completely callous, indifferent. They stood before the dark porchless façade of her home.

"I thought life was so happy," she articulated, facing him; "but now it hurts me . . . here;" he saw her press her hand against the swelling, tender line of her breast. His theatrical self-consciousness bowed him over the other hand, pressing upon it a half-calculated kiss. She stood motionless; he felt rather than saw the intensity of her gaze. "I wish I could mend the hurt," he began, appropriately, professionally.

He was interrupted by a figure emerging from the obscurity of the house. Pompey Hollidew peered at them from the low stone lintel. "Letty," he pronounced, in a voice at once whining and truculent; "who?—oh! that Makimmon. . . . Letty, come in the house." He caught her arm and dragged her incontinently toward the door. ". . . rascal," Gordon heard him mutter, "spendthrift. If you ever walk again with Gordon Makimmon," the old man, through his daughter, addressed the other, "don't walk back here, don't come home. Not a dollar of mine shall fall through the pockets of that shiftless breed."

XX

CLARE'S funeral deducted a further sum from the amount Gordon had received for the sale of his home, but he had left still nine hundred and odd dollars. He revolved in his mind the disposition of this sum, once more sitting with chair tilted back against the dingy wooden home of the *Greenstream Bugle;* he rehearsed its possibilities for frugality, for independence, as a reserve . . . or for pleasure. It was the hottest hour of the day; the prospect before him, the uneven street, the houses beyond, were coated with dust, gilded by the refulgent sun. No one stirred; a red cow that had been cropping the grass in the broad, shallow gutter opposite sank down in the meagre shadow of a chance pear tree; even the children were absent, the piercing staccato cries of their games unheard.

To Gordon Makimmon Greenstream suddenly appeared insufferably dull, empty; the thought of monotonous, identical days spun thinly out, the nine hundred dollars extended to its greatest length, in that banal setting, suddenly grew unbearable. . . . There was no life in Greenstream. . . .

The following morning found him on the front seat of the Stenton stage, sharing with the driver not his customary cigarettes, but more portentous cigars from an ample pocketful. "Greenstream's

dead," he pronounced; "I'm going after some life."

Late that night he leaned across the sloppy bar of an inferior saloon in Stenton and, with an uncertain wave of his hand, arrested the barkeeper's attention. "I'm here," he articulated thickly, "to see life, understand! And I can see it too—money's power." The other regarded him with a brief, mechanical interest, a platitude shot suavely from hard tobacco-stained lips.

Later still: "I'm here to see life," he told a woman with a chalky countenance, a countenance without any expression of the consciousness of the sound of his voice, a vague form lost in loose draperies. "Life," he emphasized above the continuous macabre rattle of a piano.

In a breathless hot dawn pouring redly into the grey city street, he swayed like a pendulum on the steaming pavement. His side was smeared, caked, with unnamable filth, refuse; a tremulous hand gripped feverishly the shoulder of a policeman who had roused him from a constrained stupor in a casual angle. "I wan' to see life," he mumbled dully, "I got power . . . money." He fumbled through his pockets in search of the proof of his assertion. In vain—all that was left of the nine hundred and sixty dollars was some loose silver.

XXI

AGAIN sober, without the resources of the city-bred parasite, and without money, his instinct, his longing drew him irresistibly into the open; his heredity forced him toward the mountains, into familiar paths, valleys, heights.

He avoided the stage road and progressed toward Greenstream by tangled trails, rocky ascents, sharp declines. By late day he had penetrated to the heart of the upland region. He stood gazing down upon the undulating, verdant hills, over which he could trace the course of a thunder gust. The storm moved swiftly, in a compact circular shadow on the sunny slope; he could distinguish the sudden twisting of limbs, the path of torn leaves, broken branches, left by the lash of the wind and rain. The livid, sinister spot on the placid greenery drew nearer; he could now hear the continuous rumble of thunder, see the stabbing purplish flashes of lightning. The edge of the storm swept darkly over the spot where he was standing; he was soaked by a momentary assault of rain driving greyly out of a passing profound gloom. Then the cloud vanished, leaving the countryside sparkling and serene under a stainless evening sky.

The water dripped down his back, swashed in his shoes; he was, in his lowered vitality, supremely un-

comfortable. The way was slippery with mud; wet leaves bathed his face in sudden chill showers, clung to his hands. He fell.

When he arrived at the rim of Greenstream, night had hidden that familiar, welcome vista. The lights of the houses shone pale yellow below. A new reluctance to enter this place of home possessed him, a shame born of his denuded pockets, his bedraggled exterior. He descended, but turned to the left, finding a rude road which skirted the base of the eastern range. He was following no definite plan, moving slowly, without objective; but a window glimmering in a square of orange light against the night brought him to a halt. It marked, he knew, the dwelling of the Jesuit priest, Merlier. In a sudden impulse he advanced over a short path and, fumbling, found the door, where he knocked. A chair scraped within and the door swung open. The form of the priest was dark against the lighted interior which absorbed them.

XXII

THE room was singularly bare: a tin lamp with a green glass shade, on an uncovered deal table, illuminated an open book, wood chairs with roughly split hickory backs, a couch with no covering over its wire springs and iron frame; there was no carpet on the floor of loosely grooved boards, no decorations on the plastered walls save a dark engraving of a man in intricate armour, with a face as passionate, as keen, as relentless, as a hawk's, labelled, "Loyola."

Merlier silently indicated a chair, but he remained standing with his gaze lowered upon the floor. He was a burly man, with a heavy countenance impassive as an Oriental's, out of which, startling in its unexpected rapidity, a glance flashed and stabbed, as steely as Loyola's sword. His hands were clasped before him; they were, in that environment, strangely white, and covered with the scars of what, patently, were unaccustomed employments.

"It feels good inside," Gordon observed tritely. He noted uneasily the muddy tracks his shoes had printed upon the otherwise spotless board floor. "I got caught in a gust on the mountain," he explained awkwardly, in a constraint which deepened with the other's continued silence; "I ought to have

cleaned up before I came in . . . it's terrible dark out." He rose, tentatively, but the priest waved him back into the chair. Opening a door opposite the one by which Gordon had entered, and which obviously gave upon an outer shed, Merlier procured a roughly made mop; and, returning, he obliterated all traces of the mud. Suddenly, to Gordon's dismay, his supreme discomfort, he stooped to a knee, and began to remove the former's shoes.

"Hey!" Gordon protested; "don't do that; I can tend to my own feet." He was prepared to kick out, but he recognized that a struggle could only make the situation insufferable, and he submitted in an acute, writhing misery to the ministrations. The priest rose with Gordon's shoes and placed them, together with the mop, outside the door. He then brought from an inner room an immaculate white cambric shirt, a pair of trousers, old but carefully ironed, and knitted grey worsted slippers.

"It you will change," he said in a low, impersonal voice, "I will see what there is for you to eat." He left the room, and Gordon gratefully shifted into the fresh, dry clothes. The trousers were far too large; they belonged, he recognized, to the priest, but he belted them into baggy folds. The other appeared shortly with a wooden tray bearing a platter of cooked yellow beans, a part loaf of coarse bread, raw eggs, and a pitcher of milk. "I thought," he explained, "you would wish something immediately; there is no fire; Bartamon is out." The latter, Gordon knew, was a sharp-witted old man who had made a precarious living in the local fields and woodsheds until the priest had taken him

as a general helper. "There is neither coffee nor tea in the house," Merlier stated further.

He closed the book, moved the lamp to the end of the table, and stood with his countenance lowered, his folded hands immovable as stone, while Gordon Makimmon consumed the cold food. Once the priest replenished the other's glass with milk.

If there had been a gleam of fraternal feeling, the slightest indication of generous impulse, a mere accent of hospitality, in the priest's actions, Gordon, accepting them in such spirit, might have been at ease. But not the faintest spark of interest, of curiosity, the most perfunctory communion of sympathy, was evident on Merlier's immobile countenance; his movements were machine-like, he seemed infinitely removed from his charitable act, infinitely cold.

Gordon's discomfort burned into a species of illogical, resentful anger. He cursed the priest under his breath, choked on the food; he was heartily sorry that he had obeyed the fleeting impulse to enter. But even the anger expired before Merlier's impassivity—he might as well curse a figure carved from granite, cast in lead. He grew, in turn, uneasy at the other's supernatural detachment; it chilled his blood like the grip of an unexpected, icy hand, like the imminence of inevitable death. The priest resembled a dead man, a dead man who had remained quick in the mere physical operations of the body, while all the machinery of his thoughts, his feelings, lay motionless and cold within.

Gordon found relief in a customary cigarette when the uncomfortable repast was finished. The priest removed the dishes and reappeared with bed linen, with which he proceeded to convert the bare couch

into a provision for sleeping. Then he returned the lamp to the centre of the table, opened the book, and, seated with his back squarely toward the room, addressed himself to the pages.

Gordon Makimmon's head throbbed, suddenly paining him—it was as though sharp, malicious fingers were compressing the spine at the base of his brain. That, and the profound weariness which swept over him, were disconcerting; he was so seldom ill, so rarely tired, that those unwelcome symptoms bore an aggravated menace; it was the slight premonitory rusting, the corrosion of time, upon the iron of his manhood.

In an instinctive need for human support, the reassurance of the comprehension of his kind, he directed an observation at the broad, squat, sombre back. "I might have been drunk a month," he asserted, "by the way I feel." The priest paused in his reading, inserted a finger in the page, and half turned. Gordon could see the full smooth cheek, the drooping gaze, against the green radiance of the lamp.

"If you will drink," Merlier said in a bitter, repressed voice, "if you will indulge the flesh, don't whimper at the price." He made a gesture, indicating the bed, then returned to his reading.

"The man doesn't live who's heard me whimper," Gordon began loudly; but his angry protest trailed into silence. There was no comfort, no redress, to be obtained from that absorbed, ungainly figure. He slipped out of the baggy trousers, the worsted slippers, and, extending himself on the couch, fell heavily asleep.

XXIII

When he woke the room was bright with narrow strips of sun, already too high to shine broadly through the doors and windows. His clothes, dry and comparatively clean, reposed on a chair at his side, and, washing in the basin which he found outside the door, he hastily dressed. He looked, tentatively, for the priest, but found only his aged helper in the roughly-cleared space at the back of the house.

Bartamon was a small man, with a skull-like head, to the hollows of which, the bony projections, dark skin clung dryly; his eyes were mere dimming glints of watery consciousness; and from the sleeves of a faded blue shirt, the folds of formless canvas trousers, knotted, blackish hands, grotesque feet, appeared to hang jerking on wires.

"Where's the Father?" Gordon inquired.

The other rested from the laborious sawing of a log, blinking and tremulous in the hard brilliancy of midday. "Beyond," he answered vaguely, waving up the valley; "Sim Caley's wife sent for him from Hollidew's farm. Sim or his wife think they're going to die two or three times the year, and bother the Father. . . . But I wouldn't wonder they would, and them working for Hollidew, dawn, day, and dark, with never a proper skinful of food, only

this and that, maybe, chick'ry and fat pork and mouldy ends of nothing."

He filled the blackened ruin of a pipe, shaking in his palsied fingers, clasped it in mumbling, toothless gums: he was so sere, so juiceless, that the smoke trailing from his sunken lips might well have been the spontaneous conflagration of his desiccated interior.

"Hollidew's a terrible man for money," he continued; "it hurts him like a cut with a hick'ry to see a dollar go. They say he won't hear tell of quitting his fortune for purgatory, no, nor for heaven neither. He can't get him to make a will, the lawyer can't. He was telling the Father the other day, sitting right in the house there, 'Pompey Hollidew,' he says, 'won't even talk will. . . .' He'd like to take it all with him to the devil, Pompey would." He turned with a sigh to the log. A cross-cut saw, with a handle at either end, lay upon the ground; and Gordon, grasping the far handle, helped him to drag the slim, glittering steel through the powdering fibre of the wood.

As he worked mechanically Gordon's thoughts returned to the past, the past which had collapsed so utterly, so disastrously, so swiftly upon his complacency, robbing him of his sustenance, of Clare, of his home. The complaining voice of the old man finally pierced his abstraction. "If you are going to ride," Bartamon complained, "don't drag your feet."

The two men consumed a formless, ample meal, after which Gordon still waited negligently for the priest. The sun sank toward the western range; the late afternoon grew as hushed, as rich in colour,

in vert shadows, ultramarine, and amber, as heavy in foliage bathed in aureate light, as the nave of a cathedral under stained glass.

In a corner of the shed Gordon found a fishing rod of split bamboo, sprung with time and neglect, the wrappings hanging and effectually loose. A small brass reel was fastened to the butt, holding an amount of line. He balanced the rod in his grasp, discovering it to be the property of the old man.

"What'll you take for it?" he demanded. His store of money had been reduced to a precarious sum of silver; but the longing had seized him to fish in the open, to follow a stream into the tranquil dusk.

"I got some flies too." The other resurrected a cigar box, which held some feathered hooks attached to doubtful guts. "They are dried out," Gordon pronounced, testing them; "what will you take for the whole worthless lot?" Bartamon demurred: the rod had been a good rod, it had been given to him in the past by a mayor, or had it been a senator? It was not like common rods, made of six strips of bamboo, but of eight; the line was silk. . . . He would take sixty cents.

Delaying his expression of gratitude to the priest —he could stop on his return with trout—Gordon was soon tramping over the soft, dusty road to where he bordered a stream skirting the eastern range. A shelf of pasturage ran, deep blue-green sod, against the rocky wall; to the left, through scattered trees, the valley was visible; on the right the range mounted precipitant, verdant, to its far crown. The stream, now torn to white foam on a rocky descent, now swept with a glassy rush between level green

banks, now moved slowly in a deep-shaded pool, where gleaming bubbles held filmed sliding replicas of the banks, the trees, the sky.

The sun, growing less a source of light than a brilliant circle of carmine, almost touched the western range; the shadow troop swept down the slope and lengthened across the valley; cut by the trunks of trees, the light fell in dusty gold bars across the water. Gordon drew the line through the dipping tip, knotting on three of the flies. Then he quietly followed the stream to where it fell into a circular stone-bound basin. He made his cast with a quick turn of the wrist, skilfully avoiding the high underbrush, the overhanging limbs. The flies swung out and dropped softly on the water. On the second cast he caught a trout—a silvery, gleaming shape flecked with vermilion and black, shaded with mauve and emerald and maroon.

In a shallow reach he waded, forgetful of his clothes. He caught another trout, another and another, stringing them on a green withe. He cast indefatigably, but with the greatest possible economy of effort; his progress was all but soundless; he slipped down stream like a thing of the woods, fishing with delicate art, with ardour, with ingenuity, and with continual success.

The sun disappeared in a primrose void behind the darkening mountains; the hush deepened upon the valley, a hush in which the voice of the stream was audible, cool—a sound immemorially old, lingering from the timeless past through vast, dim changes, cataclysms, carrying the melancholy, eloquent, incomprehensible plaint of primitive nature.

Gordon was absorbed, content; the quiet, the magic veil of oblivion, of the woods, of the immobile mountains, enveloped and soothed him, released his heart from its oppression, banished the fever, the struggle, from his brain. The barrier against which he still fished was mauve, the water black; the moon appeared buoyantly, like a rosy bubble blown upon a curtain of old blue velvet. He cast once more, and met his last strike, a heavy jar that broke the weakened line, in a broad, still expanse where white moths fluttered above the water in a cold stagnant gloom. He saw the rotting wall of a primitive dam, the crumbling, fallen sides of a rude mill. Night fell augustly. The whippoorwills cried faint and distant.

He sat on a log, draining his shoes, pressing the water from his trousers, and smoked while the light of the moon brightened into a silvery radiance in which objects, trees, were greyly visible; reaches sank into soft obscurity. He recognized his position from the ruined mill—he was on the edge of that farm of Pompey Hollidew's of which Bartamon had spoken. Hollidew, he knew, seldom visited his outlying acres, and then only in the collection of rents or profits—they lay too far from his iron chest, from the communication of the Stenton banks. Gordon knew Sim Caley, and, suddenly, he decided to visit him; the trout would afford the Caleys and himself an ample repast.

He crossed the road, made his way through a fragrant tangle of field grass, over shorn and orderly acres of grazing. The moon rose higher, grew brighter; the vistas were clear, unreal, the shadows like spilled ink. The house toward which he moved

stood sharply defined and enclosed by a fence, flowers, from the farm. As he approached he saw that no lights were visible, but a blur of white moved in the shadow of the portico. He decided that it was Sim Caley's wife; and, opening the gate, advanced with a query for Mrs. Caley's health forming on his lips.

But it was Lettice Hollidew.

XXIV

She retreated, as he advanced, within the deeper obscurity of an opened door, but he had seen, in the shimmering, elusive light, her features, gathered the unmistakable, intangible impression of her person.

"It's me—Gordon Makimmon," he said. He paused by the step, on which he laid the trout, shining with sudden liquid gleams of silver in the moonlight.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in a low voice; "oh!" She moved forward, materializing, out of the dark, into a figure of white youth. Her face was pale; there were white ruffles on her neck, on her arms; her skirt clung simply, whitely, about her knees and ankles.

"I stopped to see Sim," he explained further, "and took you for Mrs. Caley. I reckoned I'd bring them some trout: I didn't know your father was here."

"Won't you sit down? Mrs. Caley is sick, and Sim's on the mountain with the cattle. Father isn't here."

He mounted to the portico, mentally formulating a way of speedy escape; he thought, everywhere he turned, Lettice Hollidew stood with her tiresome smile. "I come out here every summer," she volunteered, sinking upon a step, "and spend two

weeks. I was born here, you see, and," she added in a stiller voice, " my mother died here. Father Merlier calls it my yearly retreat."

" I'd be pleased if you'd take the fish," he remarked; " I guess I'd better be moving—I've got to see the priest."

" Why, you haven't stopped a minute," she protested; " not long enough to smoke one of your little cigarettes. Visitors are too scarce here to let them go off like that."

At the implied suggestion he half-mechanically rolled a cigarette. The chair he found was comfortable; he was very weary. He sat smoking and indifferently studying Lettice Hollidew. She was, to-night, prettier than he had remembered her. She was telling him, in a voice that rippled cool and low like the stream, of Mrs. Caley's indisposition. Her face, now turned toward the fields, was dipped in the dreaming radiance; now it was blurred, vaguely appealing, disturbing. Her soft youth was creamy, distilling an essence, a fragrance, like a flower; it was one with the immaculate flood of light bathing the world in virginal beauty.

A new interest stirred within him, a satisfaction grew from her palpable liking for him, and was reflected in the warmer tones of his replies; a new pain ordered his comments. The situation, too, appealed to him; his instinct responded to the obvious implications of the position in the exact degree of his habit of mind. The familiar professional gallantry took possession of him, directing the sensuality to which he abandoned himself.

He moved from the chair to the step by her side. Nearer, she was more appealing still; a lovely

shadow dwelt at the base of her throat; the simple dress took the soft curves of her girlish body, stirred with her breathing. Her hands lay loosely in her lap, and the impulse seized him to take them up, but he repressed it . . . for the moment.

"I saw Buckley Simmons, yesterday," she informed him; "his face is nearly well. He wanted to come out here, but I wouldn't let him. He wants to marry me," she continued serenely; "I told him I didn't think I'd ever marry."

"But you will—some lucky young man."

"I don't think I like young men—that is," she qualified carefully, "not very young. I like men who are able to act ever so quickly, no matter what occurs, and they must be terribly brave. I like them best if they have been unfortunate; something in me wants to make up to them for—for any loss." She paused, gazing at him with an elevated chin, serious lips, intent eyes.

This, he told himself complacently, was but a description of himself, as pointed as she dared to make it. "A man who had had trouble couldn't do better than tell you about it," he assured her; "I have had a good lot of trouble."

"Well, tell me." She moved toward him.

"Oh! you wouldn't care to hear about mine. I'm a sort of nobody at present. I haven't anything in the world—no home, nothing in the whole world. Even the little saving I had after the house was sold was—was taken from me by sharpers."

"Tell me," she repeated, "more."

"When Valentine Simmons had sold my place, the place my grandfather built, I had about a thousand dollars left, and I thought I would start a

little business with it, a . . . a gun store—I like guns—here in Greenstream. And I'd sharpen scythes, put sickles into condition, you know—things like that. I went to Stenton with my capital in my pocket, looking for some stock to open with, and met a man in a hotel who said he was the representative of the Standard Hardware Company. He could let me have everything necessary, he said, at a half of what others would charge. We had dinner together, and he made a list of what I would need—files and vises and parts of guns. If I mailed my cheque immediately I could get the half off. He had cards, catalogues, references, from Richmond. I might write there, but I'd lose time and money.

"None of the Makimmons have been good business men; we are not distrustful. I sent the cheque to the address he said, made out to him for the Standard Hardware Company, so that he would get the commission, the credit of the sale." He drew a deep breath, gazing across the moonlit fields. "The Makimmons are not distrustful," he reiterated; "he robbed me of all my savings."

His lie would have fared badly with Pompey Hollidew, he thought grimly; it was unconvincing, wordy; he was conscious that his assumed emotion rang thinly. But its calculated effect was instantaneous, beyond all his hopes, his plan.

Lettice leaned close to him with a sobbing inspiration of sympathy and pity. "How terrible!" she cried in low tones; "you were so noble——" He breathed heavily once more. "What a wicked, wicked man! Couldn't you get anything back? did it all go?"

"All." His hand fell upon hers, and neither of them appeared to notice its pressure. Her face was close to his, a tear gleamed on her young moon-blanched cheek. A sudden impatience seized him at her credulity, a contempt at the ease with which she was victimized; the effort was almost without spice. Still his grasp tightened upon her hand, drew it toward him. "In Greenstream," he continued, "men don't like me, they are afraid of me; but the women make me unhappy—they tell me their troubles; I don't want them to, I keep away from them."

"I understand that," she declared eagerly; "I would tell you anything."

"You are different; I want you to tell me . . . things. But the things I want to hear may not come to you. I would never be satisfied with a little. The Makimmons are all that way—everything or nothing."

She gently loosened her hand, and stood up, facing him. Her countenance, turned to the light, shone like a white flame; it was tensely aquiver with passionate earnestness, lambent with the flowering of her body, of dim desire, the heritage of flesh. She spoke in a voice that startled Gordon by its new depth, the brave thrill of its undertone.

"I could only give all," she said. "I am like that too. What do you wish me to tell you? What can I say that will help you?"

"Ever since I first saw you going to the Stenton school," he hurried on, "I have thought about you. I could hardly wait for the Christmas holidays, to have you in the stage, or for the summer when you came home. Nobody knows; it has been a secret

. . . it seemed so useless. You were like a . . . a star," he told her.

"How could I know?" she asked; "I was only a girl until—until Buckley . . . until to-night, now. But I can never be that again: something has happened . . . in my heart; something has gone, and come." Her voice grew shadowed, wistful. It carried to him, in an intangible manner, a fleet warning, as though something immense, unguessed, august, uttered through Lettice Hollidew the whisper of a magnificent and terrible menace. He felt again as he had felt as a child before the vast mystery of night. An impulse seized him to hurry away from the portico, from the youthful figure at his side; a sudden illogical fear chilled him. But he summoned the hardihood, the scepticism, of his heart; he defied—while the sinking within him persisted—not the girl, but the nameless force beyond, above, about them. "You are like a star," he repeated, in forced tones.

He rose and stood before her. She swayed toward him like a flower bowed by the wind. He put his arms around her; her head lay back, and he kissed the smooth fullness of her throat. He kissed her lips.

The eternal, hapless cry of the whippoorwills throbbed on his hearing. The moon slipped behind a corner of the house, and a wave of darkness swept over them. Lettice began to tremble violently, and he led her back to their place on the veranda's edge. She was silent, and clung to him with a reluctant eagerness. He kissed her again and again, on a still mouth, but soon her lips answered his desire. It grew constantly darker, the silvery

vistas shortened, grew blurred, trees merged into indistinguishable gloom.

Lettice murmured a shy, unaccustomed endearment. Gordon was stereotyped, commonplace; he was certain that even she must recognize the hollowness of his protestations. But she never doubted him; she accepted the dull, leaden note of his spurious passion for the clear ring of unalloyed and fine gold.

Suddenly and unexpectedly she released herself from his arms. "Oh!" she exclaimed, in conscience-stricken tones, "Mrs. Caley's medicine! I—forgot; she should have had some long ago." He tried to catch her once more in his embrace, restrain her. "It would be better not to wake her up," he protested; "sleep's what sick folks need." But she continued to evade him. Mrs. Caley must have her medicine. The doctor had said that it was important. "It's my duty, Gordon," she told him, "and you would want me to do that."

He stifled with difficulty an impatient exclamation. "Then will you come back?" he queried. He took her once more close in his arms. "Come back," he whispered hotly in her ear.

"But, dear Gordon, it is so late."

"What does that matter? don't you love me? You said you were the sort of a girl to give all; and now, because it is a little late, you are afraid. What are you afraid of? Tell me that! You know I love you; we belong to each other; what does it matter how late it is? Beside, no one will know, no one is here to spy on us. Come back, my little girl . . . my little Lettice; come back to a lonely man with nothing else in the world but you. I'll come in with you, wait inside."

"No," she sobbed, "wait . . . here. I will see . . . the medicine. Wait here for me—I will come back. It doesn't matter how late it is; nothing matters . . . trust in you. Love makes everything good. Only you love me, oh, truly?"

"Truly," he reassured her. "Don't be long; and, remember, shut Mrs. Caley's door."

She left him abruptly, and, standing alone in the dark, he cursed himself for a fool for letting her go—a boy's trick. But then, the whole affair did not desperately engage him. He sat in the comfortable chair and lit a cigarette, shielding it with his hand so that she would not see it, recognize in its triviality his detachment. A wave of weariness swept over him; the night was like a blanket on the land. Minutes passed without her return; soon he would go in search of her; he would find her . . . in the dark house. . . . He shut his eyes for a moment, and opened them with an effort. The whippoorwills never for a moment ceased their melancholy calling; they seemed to draw nearer to him; then retreat, far away. His head fell forward upon his breast.

Lettice Hollidew! little fool; but what was that beyond her, blacker than night?

He stirred, sat up sharply, his eyes dazzled by a blaze of intolerable brilliancy. It was the sun, a full two hours above the horizon. He had slept through the night. His muscles were cramped, his neck ached intolerably. He rose with a painful effort, and something fell to the floor. It was a rose, wilted, its fragrance fled. He realized that Lettice had laid it on his knee, last night, when the bud had been fresh. He had slept while she stood

above him, while the rose had faded. On the step the fish lay, no longer brightly coloured, in a dull, stiff heap. The house was still; through the open door the sun fell on a strip of rag rug. He turned and hurried down the steps, unlatched the gate, and almost ran across the fields to the cover of a wood, fleeing from an unsupportably humiliating vision.

XXV

He made his way to where Greensteam village lay somnolent beneath the refulgent day. The chairs before the office of the *Bugle* were unoccupied; from within came the monotonous, sliding rattle of the small footpress. Gordon sat absently revolving the possibilities held out by the near future. Hay, he knew, was still being made in the valley, but the prospect of long, arduous days in the open fields, in the hot dry chaff of the sere grass, was forbidding. He might take his gun and a few personal necessities and disappear into such wild as yet remained, contracting steadily before the inexorable smooth advance of civilization. He was aware that he could manage a degree of comfort, adequate food. But the thoughtless resiliency of sheer youth had deserted him, the desire for mere picturesque adventure had fled during the past comfortable years. He dismissed contemptuously the possibility of clerking in a local store. There was that still in the Makimmon blood which balked at measuring ribbands, selling calico to captious women.

The large, suave figure of the Baptist minister, in grey alpaca coat and black trousers, approached leisurely over the street and stopped before Gordon. The minister had a conspicuously well-fed paunch,

his smooth face expressed placid self-approval, his tones never for a moment lost the unctuous echo of the pulpiteer.

"You have not worshipped with us lately," he observed. "Remiss, remiss. Our services have been stirring—three souls redeemed from everlasting torment at the Wednesday meeting, two adults and a child sealed to Christ on Sunday."

"I'll drop in," Gordon told him pacifically.

"A casual phrase to apply to the Mansion of the Son," the minister observed; "more humility would become you. . . . God, I pray Thee that Thy fire descend upon this unhappy man and consume utterly away his carnal envelope. What are you doing?" he demanded abruptly of Gordon.

"Nothing particular just now."

"There are some small occupations about the parsonage—a board or so loose on the ice house, a small field of provender for the animal. Let us say a week's employment for a ready man. I could pay but a modest stipend . . . but the privilege of my home, the close communion with our Maker. You would be as my brother: what do you say?"

Gordon was well aware of the probable extent of the "small occupations," the minister's reputation for exacting monumental labours in return for the "modest stipend" mentioned. However, the proposal furnished Gordon with a solution for immediate difficulties; it secured him a bed and food, an opportunity for the maturing of further plans.

He rose, queried, "Shall I go right along?"

"Admirable," the other approved. "My beloved helpmate will show you where the tools are kept, when you can begin immediately."

Gordon made his way past Simmons's store to the plaster bulk of the Baptist Church, its lawn shared by the four-square shingled roof of the parsonage. Behind both structures reached a small field of heavy grass, where Gordon laboured for the remainder of the day.

Late in the afternoon an aged, gaunt man drove an incongruous two-wheeled, breaking cart into the stable yard behind the parsonage. After hitching an aged, gaunt white horse, he approached the field's edge, where Gordon was harvesting. It was the minister's father-in-law, himself a clergyman for the half century past, a half century that stretched back into strenuous bygone days of circuit riding. His flowing hair and a ragged goatee were white, oddly stained and dappled with lemon yellow; his skin was leather-like from years of exposure to the elements, to the bitter mountain winters, the ruthless suns of the August valleys. He was as seasoned, as tough, as choice old hickory, and he had pale blue eyes in which the flame of religious fervour, of incandescent zeal, was scarcely dimmed.

A long supper table was spread in a room where a sideboard supported a huge silver-plated pitcher swung on elaborately engraved supports, a dozen blue glasses traced with gold, and a plate that pictured in a grey, blurred fashion the Last Supper. The gathering ranged variously from the aged circuit rider to the minister's next but one to the youngest: he had fourteen children, of whom nine were ravenously present. The oldest girl at the table, a possible sixteen years, had this defiant detachment under her immediate charge, acquitting herself notably by a constant stream of sharp

negations opposed to a varied clamour of proposals, attempted forages upon the heaped plates, sly reprisals and a sustained, hysterical note which threatened at any time, and in any youthful individual, to burst into angry wails.

Opposite Gordon Makimmon sat a slight feminine figure whom he recognized as the teacher of the past season's local school. She had a pallid face, which she rarely raised, compressed lips, and hands which attracted Gordon by reason of their white deftness, the precise charm of their pointed fingers. During a seemingly interminable grace, pronounced in a rapid sing-song by the circuit rider, Gordon saw her flash her gaze about the table, the room; and its sombre, resentful fire, its restrained fury of impatience, of disdain, of hatred, coming from that fragile, silent shape, startled him.

The Baptist minister addressed the company in sonorous periods, which, however, did not prevent him from assimilating a prodigious amount of food. Between forkfuls of chicken baked in macaroni, " I rejoice that my ministrations are acceptable to Him," he pronounced; " three souls Wednesday last, two adults and a child on Sunday."

The aged evangelist could scarcely contain his contempt at this meagre tally. " What would you say, Augustus," he demanded in eager, tremulous triumph, " to two hundred lost souls roaring up to the altar, casting off their wickedness like snakes shed their skins ? Hey ? Hey ? What would you say to two hundred dipped in the blood of the lamb and emerging white as the Dove ? Souls ain't what they were," he muttered pessimistically; " it used to be you could hear the Redeemed a spell of miles

from the church; now they're as confidential as a man borrowing money. The Lord will in no wise acknowledge the faint in spirit." Suddenly, "Glory! Glory!" he shouted, and his old eyes flamed with the inextinguishable blaze of his enthusiasm.

The minister's wife inserted in the door from the kitchen a face bright red from bending over the stove. "Now, pa," she admonished, "you'll scare them children again."

XXVI

The "board or so" to be replaced on the ice house proved, as Gordon had surmised, to be extensive—a large section of the inner wall had rotted from the constant dampness, the slowly seeping water. The ice house stood behind the dwelling, by the side of the small barn and beyond a number of apple trees; it was a square structure of boards, with no opening save a low door under the peak of the roof, with a small platform and exterior flight of steps.

In the gloomy, dank interior a rough ladder, fastened to the wall, led down to the falling level of soggy sawdust, embedded in which the irregular pieces of ice were preserved against the summer. From the interior the opening made a vivid square of blue sky; for long hours the blue increased in brilliancy, after which, veiled in a greyer haze of heat, the patch of sky grew gradually paler, and then clear; the suggestion of immeasurable space deepened; above the dark hole of the ice house the illimitable distance was appalling. Gordon was resting from the sullen, muffled knocking of his hammer, when a figure suddenly blotted out the light, hid the sky. He recognized the sharply-cut silhouette of the school-teacher.

"What a horrid, spooky place!" She spoke with a shiver, peering within.

"It's cool," Gordon told her, indifferently.

"And quiet," she added, seating herself upon the platform with an elbow in the opening; "there's none of the bothersome clatter of a lot of detestable children." She raised her voice in shrill mimicry, "'Teacher, kin I be excused? Teacher! . . . Teacher——!'"

"Don't you like children?"

"I loathe them," she shot at him, out of the depths of a profound, long-accumulated exasperation; "the muddy little beasts."

"Then I wouldn't be vexed with them."

"Do you like nailing boards in a rotten ice house?"

"Oh, I'm dog poor; I've got to take anything that comes along."

"And, you fool, do you suppose I'd be here if I had anything at all? Do you suppose I'd stay in this damn lost hole if I could get anywhere else? Do you think I have no more possibilities than this?"

He mounted the ladder, and emerged upon the platform by her side, where he found a place, a minute, for a cigarette.

The woman's face was bitter, her body tense.

"I'll grow old and die in places like this," she continued passionately; "I'll grow old and die in poky little schools, and wear prim calico dresses, with a remade old white mull for commencements. I'll never hear anything but twice two, and Persia is bounded on the north by—with all the world beyond, Paris and London and Egypt, for the lucky. I want to live," she cried to Gordon Makimmon, idly curious, to the still branches of the apple trees,

the vista of village half-hid in dusty foliage. "I want to see things, things different, not these dumb, depressing mountains. I want to see life!"

Gordon had a swift memory of a city street grey in a reddening flood of dawn, of his own voice mumbling out of an overwhelming, nauseous desperation that same insistent desire. "Perhaps," he ventured, "you wouldn't think so much of it when you'd seen it."

"Wouldn't I?" she exclaimed; "oh, wouldn't I?—smart crowds and gay streets and shops on fire with jewels. That's where I belong; I'd show them; I've got a style, if I only had a chance! I've got a figure . . . shoulders."

He appraised in a veiled glance her physical pretensions. He discovered, to his surprise, that she had "shoulders"; her body resembled her hands, it was smoothly rounded, provocative; its graceful proportion deceived the casual eye.

With a disdainful motion she kicked off a heavily clumsy slipper—her instep arched narrowly to a delicate ankle, the small heel was sharply cut. "In silk," she said, "and a little brocaded slipper, you would see." She replaced the inadequate thing of leather. The animation died from her countenance, she surveyed him with cold eyes, narrowed lips. Her gaze, he felt, included him in the immediate, hateful scene; she gained fresh repugnance from his stained collarless shirt, his bagging knees coated with sawdust.

She rose and, her skirt gathered in one hand, descended the precarious flight of steps. She crossed the grass slowly, her head bent, her hands tightly clenched.

Later, in the yard, Gordon saw, at a lighted upper window, the silhouette of her back, a gleam of white arm. The window cast an elongated rectangle of warm light on the blue gloom of the grass. It illuminated him, with his gaze lifted; and, while, standing in the open window, she saw him clearly, she was as indifferent, as contemptuous of his presence, as though he had been an animal. A film of cambric, golden in the lamplight, settled about her smooth shoulders, fell in long diaphanous lines. She raised her arms to her head, her hair slid darkly across her face, and she turned and disappeared. He moved away, but the memory rankled delicately in his imagination, returned the following morning. The thought lingered of that body, as fine as ivory, unguessed, hidden, in a coarse sheath.

XXVII

His miscellaneous labours at the minister's filled nearly a week of unremitting labour. But, upon the advent of Sunday, mundane affairs were suspended in the general confusion of preparation for church. It had rained during the night, the day was cool and fragrant and clear, and Gordon determined to evade the morning's services and plunge aimlessly into the pleasant fields. He kept in the background until the cavalcade had started, headed by the minister—the circuit rider had driven off earlier in his cart to an outlying chapel—and his wife. It was inviting on the deserted veranda, and Gordon lingered while the village emptied into the churches, the open.

Finally he sauntered over the street, past the Courthouse, by Pompey Hollidew's residence. It was, unlike the surrounding dwellings, built of brick; there was no porch, only three stone steps descending from the main entrance—and no flowers. The path was overgrown with weeds, the front shutters were indifferently flung back, half opened, closed. The door stood wide open, and, as he passed, Gordon gathered the impression of a dark heap on the hall floor. He dismissed an idle curiosity; and then, for no discoverable reason, halted, turned back, for a second glance.

Even from the path he saw extending from the heap an arm, a gnarled hand. It was Pompey Hollidew himself, cold, still, on the floor. Gordon entered, looking outside for assistance: no one was in sight. Pompey Hollidew wore the familiar greenish-black coat, the thread-bare trousers, and the faded yellow shirt. The battered derby had rolled a short distance across the floor. The dead man's face was a congested, olive shade, with purple smudges beneath the up-rolled eyes, and lips like dried leaves. His end, it was apparent, had been as sudden as it was natural.

Old Pompey . . . dead! Gordon straightened up. Simultaneously two ideas flashed into his mind—Lettice and Hollidew's gold. Then they grew coherent, explicable. Lettice and the gold were one; she was the gold, the gold was Lettice. He recalled now, appositely, what Bartamon had told him but a few days before . . . Hollidew would consent to make no will; there were no other children. The money would automatically go, principally, to Lettice, without question or contest. If he had but considered before, acted with ordinary sense . . . the girl had been in love with him; he might have had it all. He gazed cautiously, but with no determined plan of action, out over the street—it lay deserted in the ambient sunlight.

He quickly left the house, the old man sprawling grotesquely across the bare hall, forcing himself to walk with an assumed deliberate ease over the plank walk, past Simmons's corner. As he progressed, a plan formulated in his mind, a plan obvious, promising immediate, practical results . . . Lettice had told him that she would remain for two weeks

at the farm. It was evident that she was still there. His gait quickened; if he could reach her now, before any one else. . . . He wished that he had closed the door upon the old man's body; any one passing as he had passed could see the corpse; a wagon would be sent for the girl.

He commenced, outside the village, to run, pounding over the dusty way with long-drawn, painful gasps, his chest oppressed by the now unaccustomed exercise, the rapid motion. When he came in sight of the farmhouse that was his objective, he stopped and endeavoured to remove all traces of his haste; he rubbed off his shoes, fingered his necktie, mopped his brow.

There was a woman on the porch; it proved to be Mrs. Caley, folded in a shawl, pale and gaunt. Suddenly the possibility occurred to him that Lettice had driven in to church. But she was in the garden patch beyond, Mrs. Caley said. Gordon strolled around the corner of the house as hastily, as slowly, as he dared.

He saw her immediately. She wore a blue linen skirt, a white waist, and her sleeves were rolled up. The sun glinted on her uncovered hair, blazed in the bright tin basin into which she was dropping scarlet peppers. She appeared younger than he had remembered her; her arms were youthful and softly dimpled; her brow seemed again the calm, guileless brow of a girl; her eyes, as she raised them in greeting, were serene.

"I wanted to explain to you," he began obliquely, "about that—that falling asleep. It's been worrying me. You see, I hadn't had any rest for three or four nights; I had been bothering about my

affairs, and about something more important still."

Bean poles, covered with bright green verdure, made a background of young summer for her own promise of early maturity. She placed the basin on the ground and stood with her arms hanging loosely, gazing at him expectantly, frankly.

"The most important thing in my life," he added; then paused. "I thought for a while that I had better go away without saying anything to you, and more particularly since I have lost everything." He could hear, coming over the road, the regular hoof-beats of a trotting horse, and he had the feeling that it must be a messenger from the village, dispatched in search of Lettice with the news of her father's death. For a moment the horse seemed to be stopping; he was afraid that his opportunity had been lost; but, after all, the hoof-beats passed, diminished over the road. Then, "Since I have lost everything," he repeated.

"Please tell me more," she demanded; "I don't understand——"

"But," he continued, in the manner he had hastily adopted, "when the time came I couldn't; I couldn't go away and leave you. I thought, perhaps, you might be different from others; I thought, perhaps, you might like a man for what he was, and not for what he had. I would come to you, I decided, and tell you all this, tell you that I could work, yes, and would, and make enough——" He paused in order to observe the effect of his speech upon her. She was gazing clear-eyed at him, in a sort of shining expectancy, a grave, eager comprehension, appealing, incongruous to her girlhood.

"But why?" she queried.

"Because I'm in love with you: I want to marry you."

Her gaze did not falter, but her colour changed swiftly, a rosy tide swept over her cheeks and died away, leaving her pale. Her lips trembled. A palpable, radiant content settled upon her.

"Thank you," she told him seriously; "it will make me very happy to marry you, Gordon."

With a fleeting, backward glance he moved closer to her, his arm fell about her waist, he pressed a hasty, ill-directed kiss upon her chin. "Will you marry me now?" he asked eagerly. "You see, others wouldn't understand: you remember what your father said about the Makimmon breed? They would repeat that I had nothing, or even that I was marrying you for old Pompey's money. You know better than that: you know he wouldn't give us a penny."

"It wouldn't matter now what any one said," she returned serenely.

"But it would be so much easier—we could slip off quietly somewhere and come back married—all the fuss avoided, all the say so's and say no's shut up right at the beginning."

"When do you want to be—be married?"

"Right away! now! to-day!"

"Oh . . . oh, Gordon, but we couldn't! I haven't even a white dress here. I might go into Greenstream, be ready to-morrow——"

"No, no, no, I'm afraid it must be now or never; something would take you from me. I knew it, I was afraid of it, from the first . . . I'll shoot myself."

She started toward him in an excess of tender pity. "Do you care as much as that?" She laid her palms upon his shoulders, lifting her face to his: "Then we will do what you say, we will go, yes, we will go immediately. You can hitch up the buggy, while I get a little thing or two. I have my beads, and the bracelets that were mother's . . . I wish my white organdie was here. You mustn't think I'm silly. You see—marriage, for a girl . . . I thought it would all be so different. But, Gordon dear, we won't let you be unhappy."

He wished silently to God that she would get the stuff in the house, that they would get started. At any minute now word would come of the old man's death, there would be delay, Lettice would learn that he had lied again and again to her. With a gesture of impatience he dislodged her hands from his shoulders. "Where's Sim?" he demanded.

"In the long field. I'll show you the stable; it won't take me a minute to get ready."

He hitched, in an incredibly short space of time, a tall, ungainly roan horse into the buggy; his practised hands connected the straps, settled the headstall and collar. He stood in a fever of uneasiness at the harnessed head. Lettice was longer than she had indicated.

When, at last, she appeared, she carried a neatly pinned paper bundle, and a fragrant mass of hastily pulled roses. Bright blue glass beads hung over the soft contours of her virginal breasts; the bracelets that had been her mother's—enamelled in black on old, reddish gold—encircled her smooth wrists.

He would have hurried her at once into the buggy,

but she stopped him, and stood facing him with level, solemn eyes.

"I give myself to you, Gordon," she said, "gladly and gladly, and I will go wherever you go, and try all my life to be what you would like." As she repeated her simple words, erect and brave, with her arms filled with roses, for a fleeting second he was again conscious of the vague menace that had towered darkly at her back on the night when she had laid in his grasp that other rose . . . the rose that had faded.

"Let's get along," he urged. The whip swung out across the roan's ears, and the horse started forward with a vicious rush. The dewy fragrance of the flowers trailed out behind the buggy, mingling with the swirling dust; then both settled into the empty road, under the burning brightness of the sun, the insensate beauty of the azure sky.

PART II

I

In the clear glow of a lengthening twilight of spring Gordon Makimmon sauntered into Simmons's store. The high, dusty windows facing the Courthouse were raised, and a warm air drifted in, faint eddies of the fragrance of flowering bushes, languorous draughts of a countryside newly green.

A number of men idling over a counter greeted him with a familiar and instantly alert curiosity. The clerk behind the counter bent forward with the brisk assumption of a business-like air. "Certainly," Gordon replied to his query, pausing to allow his purpose to gain its full effect; "I want to order a suit of clothes."

"Why, damn it t'ell, Gord!" exclaimed an individual with a long, drooping nose, a jaw which hung loosely on a corded, bare throat; "it ain't three weeks ago but you got a suit, and it ain't the one you have on now, neither."

"Shut up, Tol'able," Buckley Simmons interposed, "you'll hurt trade. Gordon's the Dandy Dick of Greenstream."

"Haven't I a right to as many suits of clothes as I've a mind to?" Gordon demanded belligerently.

"Sure you have, Gord. You certainly have," a pacific chorus replied.

"I want one like the last drummer wore through here," he continued; "a check suit with braid on all the edges."

The clerk dropped a bulky volume heavily on the counter. "The Chicago Sartorial Company," he asserted, "have got some swell checks." He ran hastily over the pages, each with a sample rectangle of cloth pasted within a printed gold border, and a cabalistic sign beneath. Finally, "How's that?" he demanded, indicating a bold mathematical design in pale orange, blue, and grey.

A combined whistle rose from the onlookers; comments of mock amazement crowded one upon another. "Jin . . . go! He's got the wrong book—that's rag carpet. Don't look at it too long, Gord, it'll cross your eyes. That ain't a suit, it's a game." A gaunt hand solemnly shook out imaginary dice upon the counter; "It's my move and I can jump you."

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" the clerk protested; "this is the finest article woven, the very toniest."

Gordon dismissed the sample with a gesture. "I'm a man," he pronounced, "not a minstrel." His attention was held by a smaller pattern, in black and white, with an occasional red thread drawn through. "That's it," he decided; "that's it, with braid. What will that damage me?"

The clerk consulted the sign appended to the sample, then raced through a smaller supplementary volume, where he located the item in question. "That cloth you picked out," he announced importantly, "is one of the best the Chicago Sartorial Company put out. Cut ample, with sleeves lined in silkaleen and back in A1 mohair, it'll stand you

thirty-eight dollars. Genuine Eytalian thread silk lining will come at four and a half more."

"She'll do," Gordon told him, "with the silk and the braid edge."

The clerk noted the order; then with a tape measure affixed to a slim wooden angle, came from behind the counter. "Remove the coat, please."

Gordon, with a patent self-consciousness, took off his coat, revealing a flimsy white silk shirt striped like a child's stick of candy in vivid green.

The whistle arose with renewed force; gnarled and blackened fingers gingerly felt the shirt's texture. "Man dear! The lily of Lebanon. Arrayed like a regular prostitute . . . silk shirt tails."

The clerk skilfully conducted a series of measurements, noting results on a printed form; outer and inner seams were tallied, chest and thigh and knee recorded, the elbow crooked. "Don't forget his teeth," the clerk was admonished; "remember the braid on the pants."

Gordon resumed his coat, the clerk returned the books to their shelf, and the factitious excitement subsided. The light faded, the depths of the store swam in blue obscurity, but the fragrance of the spring dusk had deepened.

"When are you going to get the dog, Gord?" Tol'able asked.

"What dog?" another interposed curiously.

"Why, ain't you heard about Gord's dog?" the chorus demanded. "Where have you been—up with the Dutch on the South Fork? Gord's got a dog coming he give two hundred dollars for. Yes, sir, he paid for a dog, he give real money for a four-

legged, yelping wire-hound. It ain't a rabbit dog, nor a sheep dog, nor even a bull-dog; but just plain, stinking dog."

"Ah, he did like hell—give two hundred for a dog!"

"Yes, he did. That's right, didn't you, Gord? Two hundred! I saw the cheque. God dam' if he didn't!"

Gordon admitted the facts as far as they had been stated. "But this dog," he explained, "is different from the just-happen-so hounds around here. This dog has got a pedigree; his parents were united by the church all regular and highly fashionable. He ain't expected to run rabbits nor mangy sheep; he just sits on the stoop eating sausages and syrup, and takes a leg off any low-down parties that visit with him without a collar on. He'll be on the Stenton stage this evening," he added. "I got word last night he was coming."

They lounged to the entrance of the store, gazing over the still road, in the direction from which the stage would arrive. Valentine Simmons was in his office; and, as Gordon passed, he knocked on the glass of the enclosure and beckoned the other to enter.

He greeted Gordon Makimmon cordially, waving him to a seat. Valentine Simmons never, apparently, changed; his countenance was always freshly pink, the tufts of hair above his ears like combed lamb's wool; his shirt with its single, visible blue button never lacked its immaculate gloss.

"You're looking as jaunty as a man should with the choice of the land before him. Lucky! lucky! charming little wife, large fortune at your disposal.

. . . Pompey left one of the solidest estates in this section. Opportune for you, very . . . miraculous, if I may say so. But there, you ornament the money as well as any other. You are right too—a free hand; yours is the time for liberality, no cares—they come later. Ah, Gordon, have you examined the details of your late father-in-law's property? Have you searched through all the items, made yourself familiar with all the—er, petty and laborious details?"

"No, not just yet; I have been intending——"

Simmons stopped him with an upraised palm.

"No more. I understand your thought exactly. It's a tiresome business. Yours is the time for liberality, no cares. However, I had a slight knowledge of Pompey Hollidew's arrangements. He was accustomed to discussing them with me. He liked my judgment in certain little matters; and, in that way, I got a general idea of his enterprises. He was a great hand for timber, your father-in-law; against weighty advice at the time of his death he was buying timber options here and there in the valley. Though what he wanted with them . . . beyond ordinary foresight. No transportation, you see; no railroad nor way of getting lumber out. But then, he had some visionary scheme or other. He held some thousand acres, most of it bought at a nominal figure. No good to anybody now; but I have got the timber fever myself—something may turn up in the far future, perhaps in another generation. . . . What would you say to a flat eight dollars an acre for the options, the money banked right to your credit? A neat little sum for current pleasures. Ah——" In spite of himself, Valentine Simmons

became grave at the contemplation of the amount involved. "I don't say I would take all, but the best, certainly the greater part."

"Why, I don't know." Gordon spoke slowly from an old-time suspicion of the other. "It's my wife's property."

"But such a dutiful little wife—the husband's word. Remember, the money in your hand."

"It certainly sounds all right. Lettice would have the cash to show. I'll speak to her."

"Better not delay. There are other options; owners are glad to sell. I have given you the privilege first—old friend, old Presbyterian friend. The time is necessarily limited."

As he mentally revolved the proposal Gordon could find no palpable objection: the timber was obviously standing fallow, with no means of transportation to a market, in exchange for ready money. Lettice would easily see the sense in the deal; besides, he had brought in her name only for form's sake—he, Gordon Makimmon, held the deciding vote in the affairs of his home.

"I don't rightly see anything against it," he admitted finally.

"Good!" Simmons declared with satisfaction; "an able man—you can see as far as the next through a transaction. I'll have the county clerk go over the options, bring you the result in a couple of weeks. Don't disturb yourself; yours is the time for pleasures, not papers."

"Hey, Gord!" a voice called thinly from without; "here's your dog."

Gordon rose and made his way to the platform before the store, where the Stenton stage had

stopped. A seat had been removed from the surrey, its place taken by a large box with a square opening, covered with heavy wire net at one end and a board fitted movably in grooves at the other. There were mutters incredulous, ironic, from the awaiting group of men; envy was perceptible, bitterness. "... for a dog. Two hundred! Old Pompey hollered out of the dirt."

"There he is, Gord," the driver proclaimed; "and fetching that dog palace'll cost you seventy-five cents." The box was shifted to the platform; and, while Gordon unfastened the slide, the men gathered in a curious, mocking circle.

The slide was raised, the box sharply tilted, and a grotesquely clumsy and grave young dog slid out. There was a hoarse uproar of gibing laughter, backs and knees were slapped, heavy feet stamped. The dog stood puzzled by the tumult: he had a long, square, shaggy head, the colour of ripe wheat, clear dark eyes, and powerful jaw; his body was narrow, covered with straight, wiry black hair; a short tail was half raised, tentative; and his wheat-coloured legs were ludicrously, inappropriately, long and heavy.

He stood patiently awaiting, evidently, some familiar note, some reassuring command, in that unintelligible human clamour. Gordon regarded him through half-closed, indifferent eyes. "Here, doggy," a hoarse, persuasive voice called; a hand was stretched out to him. But, as he reached it, "Two hundred dollars!" the voice exclaimed, and the hand gave the animal a quick, unexpected thrust. The dog sprawled back and fell on the point of his shoulder. He rose swiftly to his feet

without a whimper, standing once more at a loss in the midst of the inexplicable animosity. He watched them all intently, with wrinkles in his serious young brow. When, from behind, another hand thrust him sharply upon his jaw, he rose as quickly as possible, swaying a little upon the inappropriate legs. Another suddenly knocked his hind legs from under him, and he sat heavily upon his haunches. The laughter ran renewed about the circle.

The sum of money that had been expended upon that single dog—a dog, actually, that could neither hunt rabbits nor herd sheep—had, it appeared, engendered a bitter animosity, a personal spite, in the hearts of the men on the store platform. They were men to whom two hundred dollars was the symbol of arduous months of toil, endless days of precariously rewarded labour with the stubborn, inimical forces of nature, with swamp and rock and thicket. Two hundred dollars! It was the price of a roof, of health, of life itself.

A hard palm swung upon the dog's ribs, and, in instant response, he fell upon his side. He rose more slowly; stood isolated, obviously troubled. He drew back, stumbling, from a menacing gesture; but there was no cringing visible in his immature, ill-proportioned body; his tail drooped, but from weariness, discouragement; his head was level; his eyes met the circle of eyes about him.

Gordon took no part in the baiting; he lit a cigar, snapped the match over his shoulder, carelessly watched his newest acquisition. A heavy, wooden-soled shoe shoved the dog forward. And Buckley Simmons, in an obvious improvement upon that manœuvre, kicked the animal behind the ear. The

forelegs rose with the impact of the blow, and the body struck full length upon the platform, where it lay dazed. But, finally, the dog got up insecurely, wabbling; a dark blot spread slowly across the straw-coloured head.

No one, it was evident, was prepared for the sudden knifelike menace of Gordon Makimmon's voice as he bent over the dog and wiped the blood upon his sleeve.

"Kick him again, Buck," he said; "kick him again and see how funny it'll be."

"Why, Gordon," Buckley Simmons protested, "we were all stirring him up a little; you didn't say anything——"

Makimmon picked the dog up, holding him against his side, the awkward legs streaming down in an uncomfortable confusion of joints and paws. "I paid two hundred dollars for this dog," he pronounced, "as a piece of dam' foolishness, a sort of drunken joke on Greenstream. But it's no joke; the two hundred was cheap. I've seen a lot of good men—I'm not exactly a peafowl myself—but this young dog's better'n any man I ever stood up to; he's got more guts."

He abruptly turned his back upon the gathering and descended to the road, carrying the limp, warm body all the way home.

II

It was his own home to which he returned, the original dwelling of the Makimmons in Greenstream. He could not, he had told Lettice, be comfortable anywhere else; he could not be content with it closed against the living sound of the stream, or in strange hands. Some changes had been made since his marriage—another space had been enclosed beyond the kitchen, a chamber occupied by Sim Caley and his wife, moved from the outlying farm where Lettice had spent her weeks of "retreat" throughout the passing summers. The exterior had been painted leaden-grey, and a shed transformed into a small, serviceable stable. But the immediate surroundings were the same: the primitive sweep still rose from the well, a cow still grazed in the dank grass; the stream slipped by, mirroring its stable banks, the foliage inexhaustibly replenished by nature; beyond the narrow valley the mountain range shut out the rising sun, closed Greenstream into its deep, verdurous gorge.

High above, the veil of light was still rosy, but it was dusk about Gordon Makimmon's dwelling. Lettice, in white, with a dark shawl drawn about her shoulders, was standing on the porch. She spoke in a strain of querulous sweetness:

"Gordon, you've been the longest while. Mrs.

Caley says your supper's all spoiled. You know she likes to get the table cleared right early in the evening."

"Is Mrs. Caley to have her say in this house or am I? That's what I want to know. Am I to eat so's she can clear the table, or is she to clear the table when I have had my supper?"

"When it suits you, Gordon, of course. Oh, Gordon! whatever are you carrying?"

"A dog!"

"I didn't know you wanted a dog." An accent of doubt crept into her voice, a hesitation. "I don't know if I want a dog around . . . just now, Gordon."

"He won't do any harm; he's only a young dog, anyhow. Ain't you a young dog, a regular puppy? But, Lettice, he's got the grit of General Jackson; he stood right up against the crowd at the store."

"Still, Gordon, right now——"

"I told you he wouldn't do any harm," the man repeated in irritated tones; "he will be with me most of the time, and not around the house. You're getting too cranky for living, Lettice." He set the dog upon his feet. "What I'll call him I don't know; he's as gritty as—why, yes, I do, I'll call him General Jackson. C'm here, General."

The dog still wavered slightly. He stood intently regarding Gordon. "Here, here, General Jackson." After another long scrutiny he walked slowly up to Gordon, raised his head toward the man's countenance. Gordon Makimmon was delighted. "That's a smart dog!" he exclaimed; "smarter'n half the people I know. He's got to have something to eat. Lettice, will you tell Mrs. Caley to

give General something to eat, and nothing's too good for him, either."

Lettice walked to the door of the kitchen and transmitted Gordon's request to the invisible Mrs. Caley. The latter appeared after a moment and stood gazing sombrely at the man and the dog. She was a tall, ungainly woman, with a flat, sexless body and a deeply-lined face almost the colour of her own salt-raised bread. "This is General Jackson," Gordon explained out of the settling dark; "he'd thank you for a panful of supper. Come on, General, come on in the kitchen. No, Mrs. Caley won't bite you; she'll give us something to eat."

The room next to the kitchen, that had been Clare's, had been stripped of its furnishing and a glistening yellow pine table set in the middle, with six painted wood chairs. The table was perpetually spread on a fringed red or blue cloth, the centre occupied by a large silver-plated castor, its various rings filled with differently shaped bottles and shakers. At the end where Lettice sat, heavy white cups and saucers were piled; at Gordon's place a knife and fork were propped up on their guards. On either side were the plates of Simeon and Mrs. Caley. Each place boasted a knife and formidable steel fork—the spoons were assembled in a glass receptacle—and a napkin thrust into a ring of plaited hair plainly marked with the sign of the respective owner.

Mrs. Caley silently put before Gordon a pinkish loin of pork, boiled potatoes, and a bowl of purple, swimming huckleberries; this she fortified by a vessel of gravy and section of pie. There was tea. "Where's Lettice?" Gordon demanded. Appar-

ently Mrs. Caley had not heard him. "Lettice," he raised his voice; "here's supper."

"I don't want anything to eat, thank you, Gordon," she returned from another room.

"You ought to eat," he called back, attacking the pork. Then he muttered, "—full of ideas and airs. Soft."

III

Beyond the dining-room was their bedroom, and beyond that a chamber which, for years in a state of deserted semi-ruin, Gordon had had newly floored and rendered weather-proof, and now used as a place of assemblage. He found Lettice there when he had finished supper.

She was sitting beside a small table which held a lighted lamp with a shade of minute woven pieces of various silks. Behind her was a cottage organ, a mass of fretted woodwork; a wall pierced by a window was ornamented by a framed photograph of a woman dead and in her coffin. The photograph had faded to a silvery monotony, but the details of the rigid, unnatural countenance, the fixed staring eyes, were still clear. Redly varnished chairs with green plush cushions and elaborate thread antimacassars, a second table ranged against the wall, bearing a stout volume entitled "A Cloud of Witnesses," and a cheap phonograph, completed the furnishing.

It was warm without, but Lettice had shut the window, and the shawl was still about her shoulders. She was sewing upon a small piece of white material.

"Here, General, here," Gordon commanded, and the dog followed him seriously into the room. "Pat him, Lettice, so's he'll get to know you," he urged.

"I don't think I want to," she began; but, at her husband's obvious impatience, she experimented doubtfully, "Here, puppy."

"Can't you call him by his name?" he interrupted. "How ever'll he come to know it?"

"I don't want to call him at all," she protested, a little wildly. "I don't like him to-night; perhaps to-morrow I will feel different."

"Well, do or don't, that dog's a part of the house, and I don't want to hear Mrs. Caley say this or that about it, neither."

"Mrs. Caley isn't as bad as you make her out; it's me she's thinking about most of the time. I tell her men are not like women: they never think about the little things we do. Father was like that . . . you are too. That's all the men I have known." Her voice trailed off into an abrupt silence; she sat staring into the room, with the needlework forgotten in her hand.

Gordon turned to the dog, playing with him, pulling his ears. General Jackson, in remonstrance, softly bit Gordon's hand. "That's a dandy dog. Making yourself right at home, hey! Biting right back, are you! Let me feel your teeth. Phew——"

"Gordon," Lettice exclaimed suddenly in a throaty voice, "I'm afraid. . . . Tell me it will be all right, Gordon."

He looked up from the dog, startled by the unaccustomed vibration of her tones. "Of course it will be all right," he reassured her hastily, making an effort to keep his impatience from his voice; "I never guessed you were so easy scared."

"I'll try not," she returned obediently. "Mrs. Caley says it will be all right, too." She seemed,

he thought, even younger than when he had married her. She was absurdly girlish. It annoyed him; it seemed, unjustly, to place too great a demand upon his forbearance, his patience. A wife should be able to give and take—this was almost like having a child to tend. Lately she had been frightened even at the dark; she had wakened him over nothing at all, fancies.

He decided to pay no further attention to her imagining, and moved to the phonograph, where he selected one of a small number of waxy cylinders. "We'll see how the General likes music," he proclaimed. He slipped the cylinder over a projection and wound the mechanism. A sharp, high scratching responded, as painful as a pin dragging over the ear drum, a meaningless cacophony of sounds that gradually resolved into a thin, incredibly metallic melody which appeared, mercifully, to come from a distance. To this was presently joined a voice, the voice, as it were, of a sinister tin mannikin galvanized into convulsive song. The words grew audible in broken phrases:

> . . . was a lucky man,
> Rip van Winkle . . . grummmble
> . . . never saw the women
> At Coney Island swimming . . .

General Jackson sat abruptly on his haunches and lifted a long, quavering protest. As the cylinder went round and round, and the shrill performance continued, the dog's howling grew wilder; it reached a point where it broke into a hoarse cough; then it recommenced lower in the scale, carrying over a gamut of indescribable, audible misery.

Gordon slapped his leg in acute enjoyment. "The General's a regular opera singer, a high-rolling canary. Go after it . . . a regular concert dog."

"Gordon," Lettice said, in a small, strained voice. Apparently he had not heard her. "Gordon," she repeated more loudly. She had dropped the piece of sewing, her hands were clenched, her face wet and pallid. "Gordon!" she cried, her voice cutting through the sound of the phonograph and the howling dog; "stop it, do you hear! I'll go crazy! Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!"

He silenced the machine in genuine surprise. "Why, everything works you up to-night. I thought you'd like to hear General Jackson sing; he's got a real deep barytone."

Lettice sat limply in her chair. "I stood it just as long as I could," she half whispered.

Gordon walked to the unshuttered window, gazing out; above the impenetrable, velvety dark of the western range the stars gleamed like drops of water. He felt unsettled, ill at ease; dissatisfaction irked his thoughts and emotions. His unrest was without tangible features; it permeated him from an undivined cause, oppressed him with indefinable longing. He got, he dimly realized, but a limited amount of satisfaction from the money now at his command. He was totally without financial instinct —money for itself, the abstraction, was beyond his comprehension. He had bought a ponderous gold watch, which he continually neglected to wind; the years of stage driving had sated him of horses; his clothes were already a subject of jest in Greenstream; and he had seriously damaged his throat, and the throat of Sim Caley, with cigars. He had

been glad to return to the familiar, casual cigarettes, the generous bag of Green Goose for five cents; Sim had reverted to his haggled plug. He had no desire to build a pretentious dwelling—his instinct, his clannish spirit, was too closely bound up in the house of his father and grandfather to derive any pleasure from that.

After he had spent a limited amount, the principal at his disposal lay untouched, unrealized. He got a certain measure of content from its sheer bulk at his back; it ministered to his vanity, to his supreme self-importance. He liked negligently to produce, in Simmons's store, a twenty- or even fifty-dollar currency note, and then conduct a search through his pockets for something smaller. He drank an adequate amount of whisky, receiving it in jugs semi-surreptitiously by way of the Stenton stage; Greenstream County was " dry," but whisky in gallons was comparatively inexpensive. He would have gambled, but two dollars was a momentous hazard to the habitual card players of the village. He thought, occasionally, of taking a short trip, of two or three days, to neighbouring cities outside his ken, or to the ocean—Gordon had never seen a large body of water—but his life had travelled such a narrow course, he was so accustomed by blood and experience to the feel of the mountains, that, when the moment arrived to consider an actual departure, he drew back . . . put it off.

What he was subconsciously longing for was youth. He was instinctively rebelling, struggling, against the closing fetters of time, against the dilution of his blood by time, the hardening of his bones,

the imperceptible slackening of his muscles. His intimate contact with the vigorous youth of Lettice had precipitated this rebellion, this strife in which he was doomed. He would have hotly repudiated the insinuation that he was growing old; he would still, perhaps, have fought the man who said that he was failing. And such a statement would be beside the fact; no perceptible decay had yet set up at the heart of his manhood. But the inception of that process was imminent; the sloth consequent upon Lettice's money was hastening it.

Lettice's youthful aspect, persisting in the face of her approaching motherhood, disconcerted him; it was inappropriate. Her freshly-flushed, rounded cheeks beside his own weather-beaten, lean jaw offered a comment too obvious for enjoyment. He resented, from his own depleting store, her unspent sum of days. It created in him an animosity which, as he turned from the window, noted almost with relief faint lines about her mouth, the sinking of her colour.

She was sitting with her eyes shut, the sewing neglected in her lap, and did not see Mrs. Caley standing in the doorway. The woman's gaze lingered for a moment, with an unmasked, burning contempt, upon Gordon Makimmon, then swept on to the girl.

"Lettice!" she exclaimed, in a species of exasperated concern, "don't you know better than to sit up to all hours?"

IV

THE following morning, "Oh, Gordon!" Lettice cried, "I like him ever so much; he played and played with me."

Gordon had gone to the post-office, and was descending the slope from the public road to his dwelling. He found Lettice sitting on the edge of the porch, and, panting vigorously, the dog extended before her, an expression of idiotic satisfaction on his shaggy face. They were, together, an epitome of extreme youth; and Gordon's discontent, revived from the night before, overflowed in facile displeasure.

"Don't you know better than to run him on a warm morning like this?" he complained; "as like as not now he'll take a fit; young dogs mustn't get their blood heated up."

The animation died from her countenance, leaving it almost sullen; her shoulders drooped dejectedly. "It seems nothing suits you," she observed; "you're cross when I don't like the dog and you're cross when I do. I can't satisfy you, anyhow."

"There's some difference in making over the dog and playing him out. Come here, General Jackson." The animal rose and yapped, backing playfully away. "Don't you hear me? Come right here." The dog, sensitive to the growing menace in

the voice, moved still further away. "C'm here, damn you," Gordon shot out. The dog grew stubborn and refused to move forward; and Gordon, his anger thoroughly aroused, picked up a large stone and threw it with all his force, missing General Jackson by a narrow margin.

"It seems to me," Lettice observed in a studious, detached voice, "I wouldn't throw stones at a dog I had paid two hundred dollars for."

Gordon was momentarily disconcerted. He had not intended to tell Lettice how much the General had cost. And yet, he reflected, since the village knew, with Sim Caley's wife in the house it had been folly to hope to keep it from her.

"It's his pedigree," he explained lamely; "champion stock, imported." His temper again slowly got the better of his wisdom. "What if I did pay two hundred dollars for him?" he demanded; "it's harmless, ain't it? I'd a sight better do that than some other things I might mention."

"I only said," she repeated impersonally, "that I would not throw stones at a dog that had cost so much money."

"You're getting on the money now, are you? Going to start that song? That'll come natural to you. When I first married you I couldn't see how you were old Pompey's daughter, but I might have known it would come out. I might have known you weren't the daughter of the meanest man in Greenstream for nothing. . . . I suppose I'll hear about that money all the rest of my life."

"Perhaps I will die, and then you will have no bother."

"That's a nice way to talk; that makes me out

a fine figure of a man . . . with Mrs. Caley in the kitchen there, laying right over every word; the old vinegar bottle."

"Don't you say another word about Mrs. Caley," Lettice declared passionately; "she nursed my mother in her last sickness; and she took care of me for years, when there wasn't anybody else hardly knew if I was alive or not. If it wasn't for Mrs. Caley right now I guess I'd be in an early grave."

Gordon Makimmon stood silenced by the last outburst. The tall, meagre figure of Mrs. Caley appeared upon the porch. She was clad in black calico, and wore grey felt slippers. Her head was lowered, her closed lips quivered, her bony fingers twitched. She never addressed a word to Gordon directly; and, he decided, when she did, it would be monumental, dumbfounding. The present moment was more than usually unpropitious; and, discovering General Jackson at his heels, he picked the dog up and departed for the stable, where he saw Sim Caley putting the horse into the buggy.

"I thought I'd go over to the farm beyond the priest's," he answered Gordon's query; "Tol'able's an awful slack hand with cattle."

"Your wife ought to run that place; she'd walk those steers around on a snake fence."

Simeon Caley preserved a diplomatic silence. He, too, was long and lean. He had eyes of the most innocent and tender blue imaginable, in a countenance seamed and scarred by protracted debauch, disease, abuse. It was said of him that if all the liquor he had consumed were turned loose on the mountain it would sweep Greenstream village to the farther end of the valley.

His voice, like his eyes, was gentle. "Come right along, Gord; there's some draining you ought to see to. It's a nice drive, anyways." Gordon took the reins, slapping them on the rough sturdy back of the horse, and they started up the precarious track to the road. General Jackson's head hung panting, wild-eyed, from the side of the vehicle.

V

It was late when they returned from the farm. Gordon left the buggy at the Courthouse. The thought of his dwelling, with Lettice's importunate fancies and complaints, was distasteful to him. A long-drawn-out evening in the monotonous sitting-room, with the grim form of Mrs. Caley in the background, was insupportable. There was no light in the office of the *Bugle*, but there was a pale yellow blur in the lower windows of Peterman's hotel. It might be that a drummer had arrived, and was entertaining a local circle with the pungent wit of the road; and Gordon made his way toward the hotel.

It was a painted wooden structure, two stories in height, with a wing that ran back from the road. The rooms in the latter section were reached from an outside uncovered gallery, gained by a flight of steps at the back. Contrary to his expectation, no one was in the office; a lamp shone on an empty array of chairs. But some one was on the gallery above; he could see a white skirt through the railing, make out the dark blot of a head upon the night. The illumination from within shone on his face.

The form above him leaned forward over the railing. "Mr. Makimmon," a woman's voice said, "if you want Mr. Peterman, I'll call him. He's at the back of the house."

Gordon was totally unaware of her identity.

"No," he replied, hesitatingly, "I wasn't after him in particular——"

"You don't know me," she challenged, laughing; "it's Meta Beggs; I teach the school, you know."

Instantly the memory returned to him of a woman's round, gleaming shoulders slipping into a web of soft white; he recalled the school-teacher's bitter arraignment of her life, her prospects. "I didn't know you," he admitted, "and that's the fact; it was the dark." He hesitated once more, conscious of the awkwardness of his position, talking upward to an indistinguishable shape. "I heard you were back," he continued impotently.

"Yes," she assented, "there was nothing else open. . . . Won't you come up and smoke a cigarette? It's pleasant here on the gallery."

He mounted the steps, making his way over the narrow, hollow-sounding passage to her side. She was seated overlooking the rift of the valley. "I'll get you a chair," she said, rising. At her side a door opened into a dim room. "No, no," he protested, "let me—in here?"

He entered the room. It was, he divined, hers. His foot struck against a chair, and his hand caught the back. A thin, clinging under-garment rested on it, which he deposited on a vague bed. It stuck to his fingers like a cobweb. There was just room on the balcony to arrange the chairs side by side.

VI

The spring night was potent, warm and damp; it was filled with intangible influences which troubled the mind and stirred the memory to vain, melancholy groping. Meta Beggs was so close to Gordon that their shoulders touched. He rolled a cigarette and lit it, resting his arms upon the railing. Her face was white in the gloom; not white as Lettice's had been, like a flower, but sharply cut like marble; her nose was finely modelled, her lips were delicately curved, but thin, compressed. He could distinguish over her the paramount air of dissatisfaction.

She aroused in him unbidden thoughts; without the slightest freedom of gesture or words she gave the impression of careless licence. He grew instinctively, at once, familiar, confidential, in his attitude toward her. And she responded in the same manner; she did not draw back when their arms accidentally met.

An interest, a vivacity of manner, such as Gordon had not experienced for weeks stirred in him. Meta Beggs called back into being the old freedom of stage-driving days, of the younger years. Her manner flattered his sex vanity. They progressed famously.

"You don't like the children any better than you did?"

"They get more like rats every year."

"I thought about you, held against your will."

"Don't tell lies; I went right out of your mind."

"Not as quick as I went out of yours. I did think about you, though——" He stopped, but she insisted upon his finishing the remark. "Well, I remembered what you said about your shoulders, and I saw you that night at your window. . . ."

"Men, somehow, are always curious about me," she remarked indifferently; "they have bothered me ever since I was a girl. I make them mad. I never worry about such things myself—from the way women talk, and men go on, there must be something left out of me . . . it just seems silly to get all red in the face——"

He almost constructed her words into a challenge. Five years ago, he continued, or only two, he would have changed her conception of living, he would have broken down her indifference, but now—— His mental deliberations ended abruptly, for, even in his mind, he avoided all reference to Lettice; they studiously omitted her name in their conversation.

"Are you going to the camp meeting on South Fork next week?" she demanded. "I have never seen one. Buckley Simmons says all sorts of things happen. He's going to take me on Saturday. I wish——" She broke off pointedly.

"What?"

"I was going to say that I wish—well, I wish I were going with somebody else than Buckley; he bothers me all the time."

"I'd like a lot to take you. It's not fit for you to go, though. The best people in Greenstream don't. They get crazy with religion, and with rum; often as not there's shooting."

"Oh! I had no idea. I don't know as I will go. I wish you would be there. If I go, will you be there to look out for me?"

"I hadn't thought of it. Still, if you're there, and want me around, I guess that's where I will be."

"I feel better right away; I'll see you, then; it's a sort of engagement between you and me. Buckley Simmons needn't know. Perhaps we can slip away from him for a while."

Voices rose from below them, and they drew back instinctively. Gordon found in this desire to avoid observation an additional bond with Meta Beggs; the aspect of secrecy gave a flavour to their communion. They remained silent, with their shoulders pressed together, until the voices, the footfalls, faded into the distance.

He rose to go, and she held out her hand. At its touch he recalled how pointed the fingers were; it was incredibly cool and smooth, yet it seemed to instil a subtle fire into his palm. She stood framed in her doorway, bathed in the intimate, disturbing aroma of her person. Gordon recalled the cobwebby garment on the bed. He made an involuntary step toward her, and she drew back into the room . . . the night was breathlessly still. If he took another step forward, he wondered, would she still retreat? Somewhere in the dark interior he would come close to her.

"Good night." Her level, impersonal voice was like a breath of cold air upon his face.

"Good night," he returned hastily. "I got turned right around." His departure over the gallery was not unlike a flight.

VII

THE memory of Meta Beggs was woven like a bright thread through the monotonous texture of the days which immediately followed. She was never entirely out of his thoughts; she stirred him out of all proportion to any assignable cause; she irritated him. He remembered that she had said she made men "mad." He recalled how ridiculous he had felt as he had said "Good night." He wished to repay her for that injury to his self-esteem.

At the same time, curiously, he was more patient with Lettice, he had a more ready sympathy for her intangible fancies. Perhaps for the first time he enjoyed sitting quietly on the porch of his house with her and General Jackson. He sat answering her endless queries, fears, assenting half-absently to her projections, with the thought of Meta Beggs at the back of his mind. He wanted to be as nice as possible to Lettice. Suddenly she seemed a little removed from him, from the world in general, the world of the emotions and ideas that centred about the school-teacher.

Lettice was—superior; he recognized it pridefully. Behind her temporary irrational vagaries there was a quality of steadfastness. It was clear to him now from its contrast to his own devious mind. But he found a sharp pleasure in the mental

image of the Beggs woman. He recalled the burning sensation that had lingered in his palm from the touch of her hand, the pressure of her shoulder against his as they had drawn back from the vision of those below.

He went early to the camp meeting on the Saturday appointed.

VIII

He drove, over the road that lay at the base of the western range, away from his dwelling and Greenstream village. The mature spring day had almost the appearance of summer; the valley was flooded with sparkling sunlight; but the young leaves were still red, the greenery still translucent, the trees black with risen sap. The buggy rolled through the shallow, rocky fords, the horse's hoofs flinging up the water in shining drops. The road rose slightly, turning to the right, where an intermediate valley lay diagonally through the range. Save for small scattered farms the bottomland was uncultivated, the tangled brush impenetrable.

Gordon passed other vehicles, bound toward the camp meeting, usually a single seat crowded with three, or even four, adult forms. He passed flat wagons with their bottoms filled with straw, on which women sat with stiffly-extended legs. The young women wore gay colours, their eyes sparkled in hardy faces, their hands, broad and red and capable, awkwardly disposed. The older women, with shawls folded about their stooped shoulders, were close-lipped, sombre. The men were sparely built, with high, prominent cheek bones, long, hollow cheeks, and shaven mouths touched with sardonic humour, under undented black felt hats.

There were an appreciable number of invalids and leaden-faced idiots.

The way grew wilder, the natural forms shrunk, the valley became a small plain of broken, rocky hillocks matted with thorny bushes, surrounded by marshes of rank grass, flags, half-grown osiers. The vehicles, drawn into a single way, crowded together, progressed slowly. Gordon saw in the back of the buggy before him two whisky jugs. Some one far ahead began to sing a revival hymn, and it ran along the line of carriages like a trail of ignited powder. A deep bass caught it behind Gordon Makimmon, then the piercing soprano of a woman farther back.

The camp meeting spread over a small irregular plateau surrounded by swamp and sluggish streams. Gordon turned off the road and drove over a rough, short descent to a ledge of solid ground by a stream and fringe of willows. The spring torrents had subsided, leaving the grass, the willows, covered with a grey, crackling coat of mud; the air had a damp, fetid smell; beyond, the swamp bubbled gaseously. The close line of hitched teams disappeared about an elbow of the thicket; groups of men gathered in the noisome shadows, bottles were passed, heads thrown back and arms bent aloft.

Above, a great sagging tent was staked to the obdurate ground. To the left a wooden floor had been temporarily laid about a four-square open counter, now bare, with a locked shed for storage. Before Gordon was the sleeping tent for women. The sun seemed unable to dispel the miasma of the swamp, the surrounding aspect of mean desolation. The scene was petty, depressing. It was surcharged

by a curious air of tension, of suspense, a brooding, treacherous hysteria, an ugly, raw emotional menace. A service was in progress; a sustained, convulsive murmur came from within, a wordless, fluctuating lament. Suddenly it was pierced by a shrill, high scream, a voice tormented out of all semblance to reason. The sound grew deeper and louder; it swung into a rhythm which formed into words, lines, a primitive chant that filled the plateau, swelled out over the swamp. It continued for an incredible length of time, rising to an unbearable pitch; then it died away in a great gasp.

A thin, sinister echo rose from among the willows —emotional, shrill curses, a brief raving outburst of passion, sharply punctuated with double shots, and falling abruptly to heavy silence. Gordon saw men obscurely running below.

The curtained entrance to the tent was pushed aside, and a woman walked stiffly out, her hands clenched, and her glassy eyes set in a fixed stare. Her hat was gone, and her grey hair lay upon one shoulder. She progressed, stumbling blindly over the inequalities of the ground, until she tripped on a stone. She lay where she had fallen, with her muscles jerking and shuddering, until a man appeared from behind the counter and dragged her unceremoniously to the women's shelter.

Gordon entered the tent where the service was in progress. A subdued light filtered through the canvas upon a horde that filled every foot of space; they sat pressed together on long, rough boards nailed together in the semblance of benches. On a platform at the farther side a row of men and women sat against the canvas wall; to their left a

folding organ had been erected, and was presided over by a man with a blurred, greyish countenance; while, standing at the forefront of the platform, a large, heavy man in a black frock coat was addressing the assemblage. He had a round, pallid, smooth face with long black hair brushed back upon his coat-collar, and great soft white hands.

" . . . it's rising," he proclaimed, in a loud, singsong voice, " the flood is rising; now it's about your pockets—praise God ! now it's above your waists. It's rising ! it's rising ! Hallelujah ! the sea of redemption is rising." His voice rose with the figurative flood. " At last it's about your hearts, your hearts are immersed in the Sacred Tide."

A man beside Gordon groaned and dropped upon his knees. A woman cried, " God ! God ! God !" A spindling, overgrown boy rose, fumbling at his throat. "I can't breathe," he choked, "I can't——" His face grew purplish, congested. The tumult swelled, directed, dominated, by the voice of the revivalist. He dropped upon his knees and, amid the sobbing silence, pleaded with an invisible Judge hovering, apparently, over a decision to destroy at one bloody blow the recalcitrant peoples of the earth, the peoples of His making.

" Spare us," he implored; " spare us, the sheep of hell; lead us to Thy shining pasture . . . still water; lead us from the great fire of the eternal pit, from the boiling bodies of the unsaved . . ."

Gordon Makimmon indifferently regarded the clamour. The process of " getting religion " was familiar, commonplace. He saw Tol'able sitting on a back bench; with a mutual gesture the two men rose and left the tent.

"I had to bring m'wife," Tol'able explained; "did you see her sitting on the platform? She's one of the main grievers. I got some good licker in the wagon—better have a comforter."

They walked down to a dusty two-seated surrey, where, from under a horse blanket, Tol'able produced a small jug. He wiped the mouth on his sleeve and passed it to Gordon; then held the gurgling vessel to his open throat. "There was some hell raised last night," he proceeded; "a man from up back had his head busted with a stone, and a drunken looney shot through the women's tent: an old girl hollered out they had Goddy right in there among 'em."

"They were shooting a while back," Gordon observed indifferently. "Have you seen Buck Simmons here?"

"No, I hain't. He wouldn't be here noways."

Gordon preserved a discreet silence in regard to his source of assurance of Buckley's presence at the camp meeting.

"Have another drink, Gord."

The services were temporarily suspended, and the throng emptied from the tent. A renewed sanity clothed them—girls drew into squares of giggling defence against the verbal sallies of robust-witted young men. Women collected their offspring, gathering in circles about opened boxes of lunch: a multitude of papers and box lids littered the ground. A hot, steaming odour, analogous to coffee, rose from the crowded counter. A prodigious amount of raw whisky was consumed among the vehicles by the stream and mud-coated willows.

Gordon slowly made his way through the throng,

in search of Meta Beggs; perhaps, after all, she had decided not to come; he might easily miss her in that mob. It was not clear in his mind what he should do if he saw her. She would be with Buckley Simmons, and there was a well recognized course of propriety for such occasions: he would be expected merely to greet in passing a girl accompanying another man. Any other proceeding would be met with instant resentment. And Buckley Simmons, Gordon knew, must still nurse a secret antagonism toward him. However, he had disposed of Buckley in the past . . . if necessary, he could do so again.

At the entrance to the service tent the organist, his countenance still livid in the sunlight, blew a throaty summons on a cornet, and the crowd slowly trailed back within. In the thinning groups Gordon saw the school-teacher, clad in a bright blue skirt and a hat with a stiff blue feather. She was at Buckley's side, consuming a slice of cake with delicate, precise motions of her hand, and greeting with patent abstraction his solicitous attentions.

IX

Meta Beggs saw Gordon at the same moment, and, without observation on the part of her escort, beckoned him to her. She said promptly:

"Mr. Makimmon, please take care of me while Buckley goes down by those carriages, where we saw you a little while ago, and gets his share of the refreshment there. I'm certain that dusty road made him as dry as possible."

Buckley grinned; such frank feminine acknowledgment and solicitude for the masculine palate was rare in Greenstream. "Why, no, Miss Beggs," he rejoined; "I'm in good shape for a while yet. I got a flask under the seat of the buggy——"

"I insist on your tending to it at once. I know just how it is with men—they have got to have that little refreshment . . . don't you call it 'life preserver'? I'll be right by the counter; if Mr. Makimmon will be so kind——"

"Well," Buckley agreed, "a drink don't go bad any time; the road was kind of dusty. If you insist, Miss Beggs."

"I do! I do!" He turned and left them, striding toward the lower level. Then:

"The fool!" she exclaimed viciously; "my arm is all black and blue where he pinched it. My skin is not like the hides on these mountain girls: it tears

and bruises dreadfully easy, it's so fine. Let's go back there." She pointed to where, behind the platform and counter, a path was trampled through brush higher than their heads. Gordon glanced swiftly in the direction in which Buckley Simmons had vanished. "He won't be back," she added contemptuously, "for a half hour. He'll stay down there and drink rotten whisky and sputter over rotten stories." Without further parley she proceeded in the direction indicated; and, following her, Gordon dismissed Buckley from his thoughts.

Meta Beggs wore a shirtwaist perforated like a sieve; through it he saw flimsy lace, a faded blue ribband, her gleaming shoulders. In an obscure turn of the path she stopped and faced him. "Just look," she proclaimed, unfastening a bone button that held her cuff. She rolled her sleeve back over her arm. High up, near the soft under-turning, were visible the bluish prints of fingers. "You see," she added; "and there are others . . . where I can't show you."

"Buck's pretty vigorous with the girls," he admitted; "I once dropped him down a spell for it." He was fascinated by her naked, shapely arm; it was slender at the wrist, and surprisingly round above, at a soft brown shadow. He was seized by a desire to touch it, and he held her pointed elbow while he examined the bruises more minutely. "That's bad," he pronounced; "on that pretty skin, too." He was confused by the close proximity of her bare flesh; the pulse in his neck beat visibly.

For a moment she stood motionless; then, with her eyes half closed, sulky, she drew away from him and rearranged her sleeve.

The brush ended on a slope where pine trees had covered the ground with a glossy mat of bronzed needles; and his companion sank to a sitting position with her back against a trunk. They were outside the influence of the camp meeting, beyond its unnatural excitation. The pine trees were black against the brilliant day; they might have been cast in iron; there was no suggestion of growth in the dun covering below; it was as seasonless where they sat as the sea; the air, faintly spiced and still, seemed to have lain unchanged through countless ages.

Meta Beggs sat motionless, with a look of inexpressible boredom on her pale countenance. Her hands, Gordon thought, were like folded buds of the mountain magnolia.

She said, unexpectedly, "You're rich now, aren't you, one of the richest men in the county?"

"Why I—I got some money; that is, my wife has."

She dismissed, with an impatient gesture, the distinction. "Money is life," she continued, with a perceptible, envious longing; "it's freedom, all the things worth having. It makes women—it's their leather boxes full of rings and pins and necklaces, their dresses of all-over lace, their silk and hand-scalloped and embroidered underclothes; it's their fascination and chance and power——"

"I would like to see you in some of those lace things," he returned.

"Well, get them for me," she answered hardily.

Utterly unprepared for this direct attack, he was thoroughly disconcerted. "Why, certainly!" he replied, laboriously polite; "the next time—I'll

do it !—when I'm in Stenton again I'll bring you a pair of silk stockings."

"Black," she said practically, "and size eight and a half. You will like me in black silk stockings," she added enigmatically.

"I'll bet," he replied with enthusiasm. "I won't wait to go, but send for them. You would make the dollars dance. You are different from——" He was going to say Lettice, but, instinctively, he changed it to—"the women around here. You've got an awful lot of ginger to you."

"I know what I want, and I'm not afraid to pay for it. Almost everybody wants the same thing—plenty and pleasure—but they're afraid of the price; they are afraid of it alive and when they will be dead. Women set such a store on what they call their virtue, and men tend so much to the opinion of others, that they don't get anywhere."

"Don't you set anything on your—your virtue ?"

"I'd make it serve me; I wouldn't be a silly slave to it all my life. If I can get things with it, that's what I'm going to do."

Gordon Makimmon found these potent words from such a pleasing woman as Meta Beggs. Any philosophy underlying them, any ruthless strength, escaped him entirely. They appealed solely to him as "gay," highly suggestive. They stirred his blood into warm, heady tides of feeling. He moved over the smooth covering of pine needles, closer to her. But with an expression of petulance she rose.

"I suppose we must look for Buckley," she observed. Gordon had completely forgotten Buckley Simmons's presence at the camp meeting. The

school-teacher, swaying slimly, led the way over the path to the plateau.

They saw Buckley Simmons at once: he was talking in an excited, angry manner to a small group of men. A gesture was made toward Gordon and his companion; Buckley turned, and his face flushed darkly. Gordon stood still; Meta Beggs fell behind as Buckley made his way toward them. He spoke loudly when he was still an appreciable distance away:

"You were mighty considerate about my dusty throat," he began with heavy sarcasm; "I ought to have seen at the time that you had it made up between you. This is the second time that you have broken in on me, Makimmon. I'm not a boy any longer. You can't tread on me. It's going to stop . . . now."

"There's nothing for you to get excited about, Buck. Miss Beggs and I took a little stroll while you were away."

"A 'little stroll.'" Buckley produced a heavy gold watch, the highly chased cover of which he snapped back. "Over half an hour," he proclaimed; "you stayed too long this time."

Gordon was aware of a form at his back. He turned, and saw Tol'able.

"What's the trouble, Gord?" the latter asked. Two or three others were compactly grouped behind him.

"Why, Buckley's hot because I walked with Miss Beggs while he took a drink."

The men about Buckley Simmons closed up. "Don't let Gordon crowd you down," they advised their principal; "put it up against him."

"Haven't you got enough at home," Buckley demanded, "without playing around here?"

Anger swiftly rose to Gordon Makimmon's head. His hand fell and remained close by his side.

"Keep your tongue off my home," he commanded harshly, "or you will get more than a horsewhipping."

"By God!" Buckley articulated. His face changed from dark to pale, his mouth opened, his eyes were staring. He fumbled desperately in his pocket. Gordon's hand closed smoothly, instantly, about the handle of his revolver. But, before he could level it, an arm shot out from behind him, and a stone the size of two fists sped like a bullet, striking Buckley Simmons where his hair and forehead joined. Gordon, in a species of shocked curiosity and surprise, clearly saw the stone hit the other. There was a sound like that made by a heel breaking a scum of ice on a frozen road.

Buckley said, "Ah!" half turned, and dropped like a piece of carpet.

The belligerent attitude instantly evaporated from the group behind the stricken man. "Gracious!" some one muttered foolishly. They all joined in a stooping circle about the prostrate figure. It was seen immediately that the skull was broken —a white splinter of bone stood up from a matted surface of blood and hair and dirt. Buckley's eyelids winked continuously and with great rapidity.

A mingled concern and deep relief swept through Gordon Makimmon. He knew that, had the stone not been thrown, he should have killed Buckley Simmons. He wondered if Tol'able had done him that act of loyalty. It had, probably, fatally wounded

its object. He turned with a swift, silent look of inquiry to Tol'able. The other, unmoved, dexterously shifted a mouthful of tobacco. "Whoever did that," he observed, "could sure throw a rock."

A crowd gathered swiftly, cautious and murmuring. Simmons was lifted on a horse blanket to the flooring by the counter. There was an outcry for a doctor, but none was present, and it was agreed that the wounded man must be hurried in to Greenstream. "He won't get there alive," it was freely predicted; "the top of his head is crumbled right off."

X

Gordon found Meta Beggs on the outskirt of the throng; she was pale, but otherwise unshaken. "I was sure you were going to shoot Buckley," she told him.

"So was I," he returned grimly.

"Will he die?"

"It looks bad—his head's cracked. You didn't see anybody throw that stone!" His voice had more the accent of a command than an inquiry.

"I really didn't; the men were standing so closely . . . nobody saw."

"That's good. You'll drive home with me, for certain."

"I'm glad you didn't kill him," she confided to Gordon in the buggy. She was sitting very close to him. "It would have—upset things."

"I don't believe you were a scrap frightened," he asserted admiringly.

"I wasn't. I thought how foolish you would be to spoil everything for yourself."

"I would have gone into the mountains," he explained; "a hundred men would have kept the law off me. I was a year and a half there, when—when I was younger," he ended lamely.

"I like that," she replied; "I understand it. I've wanted to murder; but it would have been silly.

I would have had to pay too dearly for a passing rage." There was a menace in her even voice, a cold echo like that from a closed, empty room, that oppressed Gordon unpleasantly.

"I guess you're not as dangerous as that," he responded, more lightly. He wondered, unable to decide, if she were consciously pressing her body against him, or if it were merely the jolting of the buggy. They were passing through the valley that led into Greenstream; the sun was lowering behind them, the shadows creeping out. They dropped from the rough, minor forms into the bigger sweep —it was like a great green bed half filled with a gold flood. Gordon's horse walked, and, in their slow progress,the stream of light flowing between the ranges changed to a stream of shadow. A miraculous pink rose opened in the east and scattered its glowing petals across the sky. The buggy wound, like an infinitesimal toy, over the darkening road.

He passed his dwelling, a long, irregular roof against the veiled surface of the stream; a light shone from the kitchen window. The streets of the village, folded in warm dusk, were empty; the white columns of the Courthouse glimmered behind the shafts of the trees on the lawn. Supper was in progress at Peterman's hotel; as Gordon and Meta Beggs left the buggy they heard the rattle of dishes within. She walked a few steps, then stopped, was about to speak, but she saw that Gordon had followed her, and turned and led the way to the steps giving to the gallery above.

Gordon Makimmon followed her without reason, without plan, almost subconsciously. He walked close behind her to where she opened the door to

her room: it was grey within, a dim curtain swelled faintly with an unfelt air.

"Black," he repeated stupidly, "size eight and a half."

She stepped into the room and faced him; her lips were parted over a glimmer of teeth. He took her roughly in his arms, and she turned up her face.

"For the stockings," she said, as he kissed her.

He kissed her again, and she murmured, faintly, "Two pairs."

It enraged him that she was so collected; her body, pressed against him from knee to shoulder, was without a tremor, her breast was tranquil. She might have been, from her unstudied total detachment, a fine, flexible statue in his straining embrace, under his eager lips. Suddenly, with no apparent effort, she released herself.

She removed the hat with the blue feather, calmly laid it on the indistinct bed, and moved to the mirror of a small bureau, where her hands glided over her smooth hair.

"Men are so—elementary," she observed, "and all alike. I wish I could feel what you do," she turned to Gordon—"just once."

"What are you made of?" he demanded tensely; "stone?"

"I often wonder."

She crossed the room to the gallery, where she glanced swiftly about. "You must leave, and I'll go down to supper. Next Sunday I am going to walk . . . in the morning."

"If you go out by the priest's," he suggested, "and turn to the right, you will find a pretty stream; farther down there's an old mill."

She drew back, waiting for him to descend to the ground below.

Simmons's clerk was standing on the platform before the store, and Gordon drew up. "How's Buckley?" he inquired.

"Bad," the other answered laconically. "They sent to Stenton for help. His head's cracked. It's funny," he commented, "with a hundred people around, nobody saw that stone thrown 't all."

"It don't do sometimes to see this and that," Gordon explained, tightening the reins.

He unhitched the horse in his shed-like stable by the aid of a hand lantern. He was reluctant to go into the house, and he prolonged the unbuckling of the familiar straps, the measuring of feed, beyond all necessity. Outside, he thought he heard General Jackson by the stream, and he stood whistling softly, but only the first notes of the whippoorwills responded. "The night's just come down all at once," he said. Finally, with a rigid assumption of indifference covering an uneasy heart, he went in.

Lettice was asleep by the lamp in the sitting room. She looked younger than ever, but there were shadows under her eyes, her mouth was a little drawn as if by the memory of pain. A shawl, he saw, had slipped from her shoulders, and he walked clumsily on the tips of his shoes and rearranged it. Then he sat down and waited for her to wake.

The flame of the lamp was like a section of an orange; it cast a warm, low radiance through the room. His gaze rested on the photograph of Lettice's mother in her coffin. He imagined that paper effigy of inanimate clay moved, turned its dull head to regard him. "I'm getting old," he told

himself contemptuously, repressing an involuntary start of surprise. His heart rested like a lump of lead in his breast; it oppressed him so that his breathing grew laboured. His mind returned to Meta Beggs: coldness like hers was not natural, it was not right. He thought again, as men have vainly of such women since the dawning of consciousness, that it would be stirring to fire her indifference, to ignite a passion in response to his own desire. The memory of her slender, full body, her cool lips, tormented him.

Lettice woke abruptly.

"Gordon!" she cried, in an odd, muffled voice; "you're always late; your supper is always spoiled."

"I had my supper," he hurriedly fabricated, "at Peterman's. It's nice in here, Lettice, with you and all the things around. It has a comfortable look. You're right pretty, Lettice, too."

The unexpected compliment brought a flush to her cheeks. "I'm not pretty now," she replied; "I'm all pulled out." General Jackson ambled into the room, sat between them. "Let's hear the General sing," she proposed.

Gordon wound the phonograph, and the distant metallic voice repeated the undeniable fact that Rip Van Winkle had been unaware of the select pleasures of Coney Island. The dog whimpered, then raised his head in a despairing bay.

A time might come in a man's life, Gordon Makimmon realized, when this peaceful interior would spell complete happiness.

XI

On Sunday he strolled soon after breakfast in the direction of the priest's. Merlier was standing at the door to his house. Gordon noted that the other was growing heavier: folds dropped from the corners of his shaven lips, his eyes had retreated in fatty pouches. His gaze was still searchingly keen, but the priest was wearing out. Gordon stopped in response to his silent nod.

"You ought to let up on yourself a little," he advised.

"Why?" the other briefly queried.

"'Why?' so's you will last longer."

To this the priest made no reply. A short, awkward silence followed, during which Gordon grew restive. "If I looked so glum about Greenstream," he continued, "I'd move out." It was as though he had not spoken. "I'd go back where I came from," he persisted sharply. The priest's lips moved, formed words:

"'Che discese da Fiesole ab antico.'"

His imperturbable manner offered Gordon not the slightest opening; and he continued uncomfortably on his way. There was a quality about that thick, black-clad figure which cast a shadow over the cloudless day, it blunted the anticipated pleasure of his meeting with Meta Beggs. There was about

Merlier a smell of death like the smell of sooty smoke.

The stream lay shining along its wooded course; the range greenly aflame with new foliage rose into radiant space; flickers hammered on resonant dead wood. Gordon banished the sombre memory of the priest. He was conscious of a sudden excitement, a keenness of response to living, like a renewal of youth. He wished that Meta Beggs would appear; his direction to her had been vague; she might easily go astray and miss him. But he saw her, after what seemed an interminable period, leaving the road and crossing the strip of sod that bordered the stream. She had on a white dress that clung to her figure, and a broad, flapping straw hat wound with white. She saw him and waved. The brush rose thickly along the water, but there was a footway at its edge, with occasional broader reaches of rough sod. In one of the latter she stooped, made a swift movement with the hem of her skirt.

"See," she smiled; "I said you would like me in them."

He attempted to catch her in his arms, but she eluded him. "Please," she protested coolly, "don't be tiresome. . . . We must talk."

He followed her by the devious edge of the stream to the ruined mill. He could see the blurring impress of the black silk stockings through the web of her dress; the dress had shrunk from repeated washing, and drew tightly across her shoulders. She walked lightly and well, and sat with a graceful sweep on a fallen, mouldering beam. Beyond them the broad expanse of the mill pond was paved with still shadows; a dust of minute insects swept above

the clouded surface. The water ran slowly over the dam, everywhere cushioned with deep moss, and fell with an eternal splatter on the rocks below.

Gordon rolled a cigarette from the muslin bag of Green Goose. "Why do you still smoke that grass?" she demanded curiously. "You could get the best cigars from Cuba." He explained, and she regarded him impatiently. "Can't you realize what possibilities you have!"

"I might, with assistance."

"If you once saw the world! I've been reading about Paris, the avenues and cafés and theatres. Why, in the cafés there they drink only champagne and dance all night. The women come with their lovers in little closed carriages, and go back to little closed rooms hung in brocade. They never wear anything but evening clothes, for they are never out but at night—satin gowns with trains and bare shoulders."

He endeavoured to picture himself in such a city, amid such a life, with Meta Beggs. He felt that she would be entirely in place in the little carriages, drinking champagne. "That's where they eat frogs," he remarked inanely. In the tensity of her feeling, the bitterness of her longing, her envy, she cursed him for a dull fool. Then, recovering her composure with a struggle:

"I would make a man drunk with pleasure in a place like that. He would be proud of me, and all the other men would hate him; they would all want me."

"Some would come pretty near getting you, too," he replied with a flash of penetration; "those with the fastest horses or longest pockets."

"I would be true to whoever took me there," she declared; "out of gratitude."

He drew a deep breath. "What would you say," he inquired, leaning toward her, "to a trip to—to Richmond? We could be gone the best part of a week."

She laughed scornfully. "Do you think I am as cheap as that—to be bought over Sunday?" She rose and stood before him, sharply outlined against the foliage, the water, the momentary flittering insects, taunting, provocative, sensual.

"Five years ago," he told her, "if you had tried this foolery, I would have choked you, and thrown what was left in the dam."

"And now——" she jeered fearlessly.

"It's different," he admitted moodily.

It was. Somewhere the lash had been lost from the whip of his desire. He was still eager, tormented by the wish to feel her disdainful mouth against his. The recrudescence of spring burned in his veins; but, at the same time, there was a new reluctance upon his flesh. The inanimate, obese mask of the priest, Lettice's sleeping countenance faintly stamped with pain, hovered in his consciousness. "It's different," he repeated.

"You are losing your hold on pleasure," she observed, critically aloof.

He leaned forward and grasped her wrist and, with a slight motion, forced her upon her knees. "If you are pleasure, I'm not," he challenged.

"You are hurting my arm," she said coldly. His grip tightened, and a small grimace crossed her lips. "Let go," she demanded; and then a swift passion shrilled her voice. "Let go, you are crushing my

wrist. Damn you to hell! if you spoil my wrist I'll kill you."

For a moment, as he held her, she reminded Gordon of a venomous snake; he had never seen such a lithe, wicked hatred in any other human being. "You are a gentle object," he satirized her, loosening his hold.

She rose slowly and stood fingering her wrist. The emotion died from her countenance. "You see," she explained, "my body is all I have to take me out of this"—she motioned to the slumbering water, the towering range—"and I can't afford to have it spoiled. You wouldn't like me if I were lame or crooked. Men don't. The religious squashes can say all they like about the soul, but a woman's body is the only really important thing to her. No one bothers about your soul, but they judge your figure across the street."

"Yours hasn't done you much good."

"It will," she returned sombrely, "it must—real lace and wine and ease." She came very close to him; he could feel the faint jarring of her heart, the moisture of her breath. "And you could get them for me. I would make you mad with sensation."

He kissed her again and again, crushing her to him. She abandoned herself to his arms, but she was as untouched, as impersonal, as a stuffed woman of cool satin. In the end he voluntarily released her.

"You wouldn't take fire from a pine knot," he said unsteadily.

Her deft hands rearranged her hat. "Some day a man will murder me," she replied in level tones; "perhaps I'll get a thrill from that." Her voice

grew as cutting as a surgeon's polished knife. "Please don't think I'm the kind of woman men take out in the woods and kiss. You may have discovered that I don't like kissing. I'm going to be honester still—last year, when you were mending the minister's ice house, and hadn't a dollar, I wasn't the smallest bit interested in you; and this year I am. Not on account of the money itself," she was careful to add, "but because of you and the money together. Don't you see—it changed you; it's perfectly right that it should, and that I should recognize it."

"That sounds fair enough," he agreed. "Now the question is, what are we going to do together, you and me and the money?"

"Would you do what I wanted?" she asked at his shoulder.

"Would you?"

"Yes."

"We might try Richmond."

"Don't fool yourself," she returned hardily; "I know all about those trial trips. Any man I go with has got to go far: I don't intend to be left at some poky little way station with everything gone and nothing accomplished."

"But," he objected, "a man who went with you could never come back."

"Back to this wilderness," she scoffed; "any one should thank God for being taken out of it."

"I've always lived here, my father too, and his before him; and back of that we came from mountains. We're mountain blood; I don't know if we could get used to anything else, live down yonder."

"I'd civilize you," she promised him.

"Perhaps——" he assented slowly.

Suddenly from beyond the ruin came the stir of a horse moving in harness. The sound stopped and the voices of men grew audible. Instinctively Gordon and Meta Beggs drew behind a standing fragment of wall. Gordon could see, through the displaced, rotting boards, a buggy and two men standing at the side of the road. One, he recognized, was Valentine Simmons; he easily made out the small, alert figure. The other, with his back to the mill, held outspread a sheet of paper. There was something familiar about the carriage of the head, a glimpse of beard, a cigar from which were expelled copious volumes of smoke. Gordon vainly racked his memory for a clue to the second, elusive personality. He heard Simmons say:

". . . by the South Fork entrance . . . through the valley."

The stranger partially turned, and Gordon instantly recalled where he had seen him before: the man he had driven from Stenton with the surprising foreknowledge of the County, who had been met by Pompey Hollidew. He replied to Simmons, "Exactly . . . timber sidings at the principal depots."

They were, evidently, discussing a projected road. Gordon subconsciously exclaimed, half aloud, "Railroad!" A swift illumination bathed in complete comprehension the whole affair—the connection of Simmons, old Pompey's options, and the stranger. This railroad, the coming of which would increase enormously the timber values of Greenstream County, had been the covert reason

for Simmons's desire to purchase the options held by the Hollidew estate; it had been, during Pompey Hollidew's life, the reason for the acquisition of such extended timber interests. Hollidew, Simmons and Company had joined in a conspiracy to purchase them throughout the county at a nominal sum and reap the benefits of the large enhancement. The death of Hollidew had interrupted that satisfactory scheme; now Valentine Simmons had conceived the plan of gathering all the profit to himself. And, Gordon admitted, he had nearly succeeded . . . nearly. A slow smile crossed Gordon Makimmon's features as he realized what a pleasant conversation he should have with Simmons at the latter's expense. He had never conceived the possibility of getting the astute storekeeper into such a satisfactory retaliatory position. He would extract the last penny of profit and enjoyment from the other's surprise.

The men beyond re-entered the buggy and drove toward the village.

"What is it?" Meta Beggs asked; "you look pleased."

"Oh, I fell on a little scheme," he replied evasively; "a trifle . . . worth a hundred thousand or more to me."

Her eyes widened with avidity. "I didn't know the whole God-forsaken place was worth a thousand," she remarked. "A hundred thousand!" the mere repetition of that sum brought a new shine into her gaze, instinctively drew her closer to Gordon's side.

"Just that alone would be enough——" she said, and paused.

He ignored this opening in the anticipated pleasure of his coming interview with Valentine Simmons.

A palpable annoyance took possession of her at Gordon's absorption. "It must be near dinner at Peterman's," she remarked; "on Sunday you've got to be on time."

In response to her suggestion he turned toward the road. They walked back silently until they were opposite the priest's. "I'd better go on alone," she decided. Her hands clung to his shoulders and she sought his lips. "Soon again," she murmured. "Don't desert me; I am entirely alone except for you."

She left him and swiftly crossed the green to the road.

XII

Gordon carefully explained the entire circumstance of the timber to Lettice. "I just happened to be by the stream," he continued, "and overheard them. Your father and Simmons evidently had arranged the thing, and Simmons was going to crowd you out of all the gain."

"You see to it," she returned listlessly; "you have my name on that paper, the power of something or other." She was seated on the porch of their dwelling. A low-drifting mass of formless grey cloud filled the narrow opening of the ranges, drooping in nebulous veils of suspended moisture down to the vivid green of the valley. The mountains seemed to dissolve into the nothingness above; the stream was unusually noisy.

"I might see him this evening," he observed; "and I could find out how Buck was resting."

"However did he come to get hurt?"

"I never knew rightly; there we were all standing with Buckley a-talking, when the stone flew out of the crowd and hit him on the head. Nobody saw who did it."

"I wish you hadn't been there, Gordon. You always seem to be around, to get talked about, when anything happens."

He saw that she was irritable, in a mood for com-

plaint, and he rose. "You mean Mrs. Caley talks wherever I am," he corrected. He left the porch and walked over the road to the village. The store, he knew, would be closed; but Valentine Simmons, an indefatigable church worker, almost invariably after the service pleasantly passed the remainder of Sunday in the contemplation and balancing of his long and satisfactory accounts and assets.

He was, as Gordon had anticipated, in the enclosed office, bent over his ledgers. The door to the store was unlocked. Simmons rose and briefly acknowledged Gordon's presence.

"I was sorry Buckley got hurt," the latter opened; "it wasn't any direct fault of mine. We were having words. I don't deny but that it might have gone farther with us, but some one else stepped in."

"So I was informed. Buckley will probably live . . . that is all the Stenton doctor will say; a piece of his skull has been removed. I am not prepared to discuss it right now . . . painful to me."

"Certainly. But I didn't come to discuss that. I want to talk to you about the timber—those options of Lettice's."

"She doesn't agree to the deal?" Simmons queried sharply.

"Whatever I say is good enough for Lettice," Gordon replied.

An expression of relief settled over the other. "The papers will be ready this week," he said. "I have taken all that, and some expense, off you. You will make a nice thing out of it."

"I will," Gordon assented heartily. "And that reminds me—I saw an old acquaintance of Pompey Hollidew's in Greenstream to-day. I don't know

his name; I drove him up in the stage, and Pompey greeted him like a long-lost dollar."

A veiled, alert curiosity was plain on Simmons's smooth pinkish countenance.

"I wonder if you know him too ?—a man with a beard, a great hand for maps and cigars."

"Well ?" Valentine Simmons temporized.

"Could he have anything to do with those timber options of the old man's, with your offer for them ?"

"Well ?" Simmons repeated. His face was now absolutely blank; he sat turned from his ledgers, facing Gordon, without a tremor.

"It's no use, Simmons," Gordon Mackimmon admitted; "I was out by the old mill this morning. I saw you both, heard something that was said. That railroad will do a lot for values around here, but mostly for timber."

Instantly, and with no wasted regrets over lost opportunities, Simmons changed his tactics to meet existing conditions. "Your wife's estate controls about three thousand acres of timber," he pronounced. "What will you take for them ?"

"How much do you control ?" Gordon asked.

"About twenty-five hundred at present."

Gordon paused; then, "Lettice will take thirty dollars an acre."

"Why !" the other protested, "Pompey bought them for little or nothing. You're after over two hundred per cent. increase."

"What do you figure to get out of yours ?"

"That doesn't concern us now. I've had to put this through—a tremendous thing for Greenstream, a lasting benefit—entirely by myself. I will have to guarantee a wicked profit outside; I stand alone

to lose a big sum. I'll give you ten dollars for the options."

Gordon rose. "I'll see the railroad people myself," he observed, "and find out what I can do there."

"Hold on." Simmons waved him back to his chair. "If there's too much talk, the thing will get out. You know these thick skulls around here—at the whisper of transportation you couldn't cut a sapling with a gold axe. It took managing to interest the Tennessee and Northern; they are going through to Buffalo; a Greenstream branch is only a side issue to them." He paused, thinking. "There's no good," he resumed, "in you and me getting into each other. The best thing we can do is to control all the good stuff, agree on a price, and divide the take."

Gordon carefully considered this new proposal. It seemed to him palpably fair. "All the papers would have to be made together," he added; "what's for one's for the other."

Now that the deal was fully exposed, Valentine Simmons was impatient of small precautions. "Can't you see how the plan lays?" he demanded irritably. "We'll draw up a partnership. Don't get full and talk," he added discontentedly. It was evident that he keenly resented the absence of Pompey Hollidew from the transaction.

"A thing like this," he informed the other, "ain't put through in a week. It will be two or three years yet before the company will be ready for construction."

Minor details were rehearsed, concluded. Two weeks later Gordon signed an agreement of part-

nership with Valentine Simmons to purchase collectively such timber options as were deemed desirable, and to merchandise their interests at a uniform price to the railroad company concerned.

XIII

When Gordon returned to his dwelling he found Sim Caley and his sister's husband taking the horse from the shafts of a dusty two-seated carriage. Rutherford Berry was a slightly-built man with high, narrow shoulders and a smooth pasty-white face. He was clerk in a store at the farther end of Greenstream valley, and had flat, fragile wrists and a constant, irritating cough.

"H'y, Gord!" he shouted; "your sister wanted to visit with you over night and see Lettice. We only brought two—the oldest and Barnwell K."

The "oldest," Gordon recalled, was the girl who had worn Clare's silk waist and "run the colours"; Barnwell K. Berry was, approximately, ten.

"That's right," he returned cordially. He assisted in running the carriage back by the shed. Lettice and his sister were stiffly facing each other in the sitting room. The latter had a fine, thin countenance, with pale hair drawn tightly back and fastened under a small hat pinned precariously aloft; her eyes were steady, like his own. She wore a black dress ornamented with large carmine dots, with a scant black ribband about her waist, her sole adornment a brassy wedding ring that almost covered an entire joint. She spoke in a rapid, absent voice, as if her attention were perpetually wandering

down from the subject in hand to an invisible kitchen stove or a child temporarily unaccounted for.

"Lettice looks right good," she declared, "and, dear me, why shouldn't she, with nothing on her mind at all but what comes to every woman? When I had my last, Rutherford was down with the influenza, the youngest was taken with green-sickness, and we had worked out all our pay at the store in supplies. You're fixed nice here," she added, without a trace of envy in her tired voice. "I suppose that's Mrs. Hollidew in her shroud. We have one of James—he died at three—sitting just as natural as life in the rocker."

"Where's Rose?" he asked.

"In the kitchen, helping Mrs. Caley. I wanted to ask that nothing be said before Rose of Lettice's expecting. We've brought her up very delicate; and besides there's a young man paying her attention; it's not a fitting time—she might take a scare. I had promised to bring Barnwell K. the next time."

They could hear from without the boy and the hysterical yelping of General Jackson. "That dog won't bite?" Mrs. Berry worried. Gordon, patently indignant, replied that the General never bit. "Barnwell might cross him," she answered, and, moving to the door, summoned her offspring. It was the sturdy individual who had burst into a wail at Clare's funeral, his hair still bristling against a formal application of soap.

"C'm on in, doggy," he called; "c'm in, Ginral. I wisht I had a doggy like that." He hung on his mother's knees lamenting the absence from their household of a General Jackson. "Our ol' houn' dog's nothing," he asserted.

Lettice, worn by her visitor's rapid monotone, the stir and clatter of young shoes, remarked petulantly, "Gordon paid two hundred dollars for that single dog; there ought to be something extra to him."

Mrs. Berry received this item without signal amazement; it was evident that she was prepared to credit any vagaries to the possessors of Pompey Hollidew's fabulous legacy.

"Just think of that!" she exclaimed mildly; "I'll chance that dog gets a piece of liver every day."

Rose, from the door, announced supper. She was an awkward girl of seventeen, with the pallid face and blank brown eyes of her father, and diffident speech. Gordon faced Lettice over her figured red cloth; on one side Barnwell K. sat flanked by his mother and Simeon Caley, on the other Rose sat by an empty chair, the place of the now energetically employed Mrs. Caley. The great tin pot of coffee rested at Lettice's hand, and, before Gordon, a portentous platter held three gaunt brown chickens with brilliant yellow legs stiffly in air. Between these two gastronomic poles was a dish of heaped, quivering poached eggs, the inevitable gravy boat, steaming potatoes, and a choice of pies. Gordon dismembered the chickens, and, as the plates circled the table, they accumulated potatoes and gravy and eggs. Barnwell K., through an oversight, was defrauded of the last item, and proceeded to remedy the omission. He thrust his knife into the slippery poached mass—at best a delicate operation. He erred, eggs slipped, and a thick yellow stream flowed sluggishly to the rim of the plate. His mother met this fault of manner with profuse, disconcerted apologies. She shook him so vigorously that his

chair rattled. Simeon Caley lifted the heavy coffee pot for Lettice.

Mrs. Caley's service was abrupt, efficient; she set down plates of hot bread with a clatter; she rattled the stovelids from without, and complained of General Jackson, faithfully following her every movement.

Sim Caley wielded an adroit knife; but, under the extraordinary pressure of this bountiful repast, Rutherford Berry easily outdistanced him. He consumed such unlimited amounts that he gained the audible displeasure of his wife.

"You're not a camel," she truthfully observed; "you don't have to fill up for a week; you get something home. What Lettice'll think of you I can't make out."

Substantial sections of pie were dispatched. Barnwell K., valiantly endeavouring to emulate his father, struggled manfully; he poked the last piece of crust into his mouth with his fingers. Then, in a shrill aside, he inquired, "Will Aunt Lettice have the baby while we're here?" His mother's hand rang like a shot on his face, and he responded instantly with a yell of appalling volume.

Lettice's cup struck sharply upon its saucer. The delicate Rose flushed appropriately, painfully. The culprit was hauled incontinently, dolefully wailing, to bed. The three men preserved an embarrassed silence. Finally Gordon said, "Have a cigar." His brother-in-law responded with alacrity, but Sim preferred his plug tobacco, and Gordon Makimmon twisted a cigarette. Sim and Rutherford were patently uncomfortable amid the formality of the dining-room, and, at Gordon's sugges-

tion, trooped with relief out to the shed-like stable. There they examined critically the two horses. Facing the stalls was an open space, and on boxes and the remnant of a chair they found places and smoked and spat informally.

"You could study a life on women," Rutherford Berry pronounced, "and never come to any satisfaction. It seems to me the better they be the more sharp-like they get. There's your sister, Gord—the way she does about the house, and with all the children to tend, is a caution to Dunkards. She does all you could ask and again. But it just seems she can't be pleasant with it. Now there's Nickles, next place to me; his old woman's not worth a pinch of powder, but she is the nicest, easiest spoken body you'd meet in a day on a horse. You mind Effie when she was young, Gord—she just trailed song all over the house, but it wasn't hardly a year before she got penetrating as a musket. Rose is just like her—she's all taffy now on that young man, but in a little spell she'll clamp down on him."

Gordon had a swift vision of Lettice sharpening with the years; there sounded in prospect on his ear an endless roll of acidulous remarks, accompanied by the fretful whine of children, intensified by Mrs. Caley's lowering silence. He thought of the change that had overtaken his sister Effie, remarked by her husband, the change from a trim, upright figure to the present stooped form, the turning of that voice brimming with song to a continuous shrill troubling.

The cool, disdainful countenance of Meta Beggs returned to him: time, he divined, would not mark her in so sorry a fashion; to the last she would remain slimly rounded, graceful; her hands, like

magnolia flowers, would never thicken and grow rough. He thought of Paris, of that life which, she said, would civilize him; he tried in vain to form an image of the cafés and little carriages, the bare-necked women drinking champagne. He recalled a burlesque show he had once seen in Stenton, called " The French Widows "; the revealed amplitude of the " widows " had been clad in vivid stained pink tights; the scene in which they disported with a comic Irishman, a lugubrious Jew, was set with gilded palms, a saloon bar on one side and a tank on the other from which " Venus " rose flatly from a cotton sea. He dismissed that possibility of resemblance—it was too palpably at variance with what Meta Beggs would consider desirable; but, somehow, pink tights and Paris were synonymous in his thoughts. At any rate it was certain to be gay; the women would resemble Nickles's wife rather than his sister . . . than Lettice as she would be in a few years.

He recalled suddenly a neglected rite of hospitality, and, from an obscure angle of the shed, produced a gallon jug. Drinking vessels were procured and a pale, pungent whisky poured out. Rutherford Berry sputtered and gasped over his glass; Sim Caley absorbed a brimming measure between breaths, without a wink of the eye; Gordon drank inattentively. The ceremony was repeated; a flare of colour rose in Berry's pallid countenance, Sim's portion apparently evaporated from the glass. The whisky made no visible impression on Gordon Makimmon. The jug was circulated again, and again. All at once Rutherford became drunk. He rose swaying, attempted to articulate, and fell, half

in a stall. Simeon Caley pulled him out, slapped his back with a hard, gnarled palm, but was unable to arouse him from a profound stupor.

"He ain't right strong," Sim observed with a trace of contempt, propping the figure in a limp angle against the wall. It was dark now, and he lit the hand lantern, cautiously closing the door. Outside, the whippoorwills had begun to call. A determined rattling of pots and pans sounded from the kitchen.

"How much is in her, Gord?" Sim asked.

Gordon Makimmon investigated the jug. "She's near three-quarters full," he announced.

An expression of profound content settled upon Simeon Caley. The jug went round and round. Gordon grew a shade more punctilious than customary, he wiped the jug's mouth before passing it to Sim—at the premature retirement of Rutherford the glasses had been discarded as effete; but not a degree of the other's manner betrayed the influence of his Gargantuan draughts of liquor. The lantern flickered on the sloping cobwebby roof, on the shaggy horses as they lay clumsily down to rest, on the crumpled figure of Gordon's sister's husband.

The potations were suddenly interrupted by a sharp knocking from without. An expression of concern instantly banished Sim's content; he gazed doubtfully at the jug, then, as Gordon made no move, rose and with marked diffidence proceeded to open the door. The lantern light fell on the gaunt, bitter countenance of his wife framed in imponderable night. In the wavering radiance her eyes made liquid gleams which,

directed at Gordon, seemed to be visible points of hatred.

"It's ten o'clock," she said to her husband, "and if you hain't got enough sense to go to bed, I'll put you."

"I'm coming right along," he assured her pacifically; "we were just having a drink around."

"Mrs. Berry's asking for her husband," she added, gazing at that insensate form.

"He must be kind of bad to his stomach," Sim remarked; "he dropped with nothing 't all on him." He bent and picked the other up. Rutherford Berry's arms hung limply over Sim's grasp; his feet dragged heavily, in unexpected angles, over the floor. "Coming, Gord?"

Gordon made no reply. He sat intent upon the jug before him. Simeon considerately shut the door. At regular intervals Gordon Makimmon took a long drink. He drank mechanically, without any evidence of desire or pleasure; he resembled a man blindly performing a fatiguing operation in his sleep; he had the fixed, open eyes of a sleep-walker, the precise, unnatural movements. The lantern burned steadily, the horses slept with an audible breathing. Finally the jug was empty; he endeavoured to drink twice after that was a fact, before discovering it.

He rose stiffly and threw open the door. Dawn was flushing behind the eastern range; the tops of the mountains were thinly visible on the brightening sky. His dwelling, with every window closed, was silvery with dew. He walked slowly, but without faltering, to the porch, and mounted the steps from the sod; the ascent seemed surprisingly steep,

long. The door to the dining-room was unlocked and he entered; in the thinning gloom he could distinguish the table set as usual, the coffee pot at Lettice's place glimmering faintly. He turned to the left and passed into their bedroom. The details of the chamber were growing clear; the bed was placed against the farther wall, projecting into the room, its low footboard held between posts that rose slimly dark against the white counterpane beyond; on the right were a window and a high chest of drawers, on the left a stand with a china toilet service and a couch covered with sheep skins, roughly tanned and untrimmed. A chair by the bed bore Lettice's clothes, another at the foot awaited his own. By his side a curtain hung out from the wall, forming a wardrobe.

He vaguely made out the form of Lettice sitting upright in the bed, her hands clasped about her knees.

"Your brother-in-law," he observed, "is a powerful spindling man." She made no rejoinder to this, and, after a short pause, he further remarked, "How he gets on sociable I don't see."

His wife's eyes were opened wide, gazing intently into the greying room; not by a sound, a motion, did she show any consciousness of his presence. He was deliberate in his movements, very deliberate, laboriously exact in his mental processes, but they were ordered, logical. It began to annoy him that his wife had made no reply to his pleasantries; it was out of reason; he wasn't drunk like Rutherford Berry.

"I said," he pronounced, "that Berry is a nubbin.

Didn't you hear me ? haven't you got an answer to you ?"

She sat gazing into nothingness, ignoring him completely.

His resentment changed to anger; he moved to the foot of the bed, where, in his shirt sleeves, he harangued her:

" I want a cheerful wife, one with a song to her, and not a dam' female elder around the house. A good woman is a—a jewel, but when your goodness gives you a face-ache it's . . . it's something different, it's a nuisance. I'd almost rather have a wife that wasn't so good but had some give to her." He sat down, clutching a heavy shoe which came off suddenly. Lettice was as immobile as the chest of drawers.

" Goddy knows," he burst out again, " it's solemn enough around here anyhow, with Sim Caley's old woman like a grave hole, and now you go and get it too. . . . Berry might put up with it, and Sim's just fool-hearted, but a regular man wouldn't abide it; he'd—he'd go to Paris, where the women are civilized and dance all night." He muttered an unintelligible period about French widows and pink. . . . " Buried before my time," he proclaimed. He stood with his head grizzled and harsh above an absurdly flowing nightshirt. In the deepening light Lettice's countenance seemed thinner than usual; her round, staring eyes were frightened, as though she had seen in the night the visible apparition of the curse of suffering laid upon all birth.

" You look like you've taken leave of your wits," he exclaimed in an accumulated exasperation; " say

something." He leaned across the bed and, grasping her elbow, shook her. She was as rigid, as unyielding, as the bed posts. Then with a long, slow shudder she turned and buried her head in the pillow.

XIV

Rutherford Berry and Effie, Barnwell K. and the delicate Rose, went after breakfast. Sim drove off behind the sturdy horse, and Mrs. Caley was audibly energetic in the kitchen. When Gordon appeared on the porch Lettice was seated in the low rocker that had so often held Clare. She responded in a suppressed voice to her husband's salutation. "You went and spoiled Effie's whole visit," she informed him, "making Rutherford drunk."

"Why," he protested, "we never; he just got himself drunk."

"It was mean anyway—sitting drinking all night in the stable."

"You'll say I was drunk too, next."

"It doesn't matter to you what I say, or what I go through with. I've stood more than I rightly ought, more than I'm going to—you must give me one thought in a day. You just act low. Father was self-headed, but he was never real trashy. He never got into fights at those common camp meetings."

"I threw the stone that hit Buck, didn't I! I busted his head open, didn't I! Oh, of course, I'm to blame for it all . . . put it on me."

"Well, how did you get in it? how did you get mixed up with the school-teacher?"

"I got Mrs. Caley to thank for this, and I'll thank her." He hotly recited the obvious aspect of his connection at the camp meeting with Meta Beggs.

"It sounds all right as far as it goes," she retorted; "but I'll chance there's a good deal more; I'll chance you had it made up to meet her there. You would never have gone for any other reason; I don't believe you have been to a revival for twenty years. You had it made up between you. And that Miss Beggs is too smart for you; she'll fool you all over the mountain. I don't like her, either, and I don't want you to give her the satisfaction of making up to you. It's what she'd like—laughing at my back!"

"Miss Beggs never spoke any harm of you."

She made a gesture, hopeless, impatient, at his innocence. Her resentment burst out again, "Why does she want to speak to you—another woman's husband? Anybody knows it's low-down. When did you see her? What did you talk about?"

"Of course when I see her coming I ought to go 'round by South Fork," he replied, heavily sarcastic.

"Well, you don't have to stand and talk like I warrant you do. There's something deep about her look."

"I've taken care of myself for some years, and I guess I can keep on."

"You can if you want to go to ruin, like you were when I married you, and you only had one shirt to your name."

"Throw it up to me. It's no wonder a man drinks here; he's got more to forget than to think

about." He stepped from the porch, preparing to leave.

"Wait!" she commanded; "I'll put up with being left, and having you drink all night with the beasts, and fooling my money away, but"—her voice rose and her eyes burned over dark shadows—"I won't put up with another woman, I won't put up with that thin thing making over my husband. I won't! I won't! do you understand that? . . . I—I can't."

He went around the corner of the house with her last words ringing in his ears, kicking angrily at the rough sod. His house, between Mrs. Caley's glum silence and Lettice's ceaseless complaining, was becoming uninhabitable. And, as Rutherford Berry had pointed out, the latter would only increase, sharpen, with the years. Lettice was a good wife; she was not like Nickles's old woman, worthless but the pleasantest body you'd meet in a day on a horse. She was not like Meta Beggs. He had never seen any other like her. Lettice had said that she would fool him all over the mountain . . . but not him, not Gordon Makimmon, he thought complacently.

He was well versed in the ways of women; he would not go a step that he did not intend, understand. This business of Paris, for example: he might tell Meta Beggs that he'd go, and then, at—say, Norfolk, he would change his mind. Anyhow that was a plan worth considering. He recalled the school-teacher's level, penetrating gaze; she was as smart as Lettice had divined; he would have difficulty in fooling her. He felt obscurely that any step taken with her would prove irrevocable.

Lettice kept at him and at him; after the baby arrived it would be no better; there would be others; he regarded a succession of such periods, a succession of babies, with marked disfavour. He had been detached for so long from the restraints of commonplace, reputable relationships that they grew increasingly irksome, they chafed the old, established freedom of morals and action. Meta Beggs blew into fresh flame the embers of dying years. And yet, as he had told her by the stream, an involuntary lassitude, a new stiffness, had fallen upon his desire. Although his marriage was burdensome, it was an accomplished fact; Lettice's wishes, her quality of steadfastness, exerted their influence upon him.

They operated now to increase his resentment; they formed an almost detached disapproval situated within his own breast, a criticism of his thoughts, his emotions, against which he vainly raged, setting himself pointedly in its defiance.

He lounged past the Courthouse, past Peterman's hotel, to the post-office. It was a small frame structure, with the wing of the postmaster's residence extending from the back. At the right of the entrance was a small show window holding two watches with shut chased silver lids, and a small pasteboard box lined with faded olive-coloured plush containing two plated nut crackers and six picks. The postmaster was the local jeweller. Within, beyond the window which gave access to the governmental activities, a glass case rested on the counter. It was filled with an assortment of trinkets—rings with large, highly-coloured stones, wedding bands, gold pins, and bangles engraved with women's flowery names; and, laid by itself, a necklace of looped seed pearls.

The latter captured Gordon's attention, it was so pale, and yet, at the same time, so suggestive of elusive colours; it was so slender and graceful, so finished, that it irresistibly recalled the person of Meta Beggs.

"Let's see that string of pearls," he requested.

The postmaster laid it on top of the glass case. "The jobber sent it up by accident," he explained; "I can't see anything to it—for the price; it's too slimsy. I wouldn't advise it, Gord. Why, for thirty dollars, and that's what it costs—diamond clasp, you can get a string of fish skin pearls, experts can't tell 'em from original, as big as your finger end, that would go twice about the neck and then hang some."

The necklace slipped coldly through Gordon Makimmon's hand; it reminded him of a small, pearly snake with a diamond head; it increasingly reminded him of Meta Beggs. She loved jewelry. If she had kissed him for a pair of silk stockings——

"I think I'll take it," he decided slowly; "I don't know if I've got her right here in my pants."

"Now, Gordon," the other heartily reassured him, "whenever you like. Of course it's a fine article—all strung on gold wire. I won't be surprised but Lettice'll think it's elegant. I often wondered why you didn't step in lately and look over my stock; ladies put a lot on such little trifles."

Meta Beggs would have to wear it under her dress in Greenstream, he realized; perhaps she had better not wear it at all until she was out of the valley. He would clasp the pearls about that smooth round throat. . . . The postmaster wrapped the pearls into a small square package, talking voluminously.

A new driver of the Stenton stage had lost a mail bag, he had lamed a horse—a satisfactory driver had not been discovered since Gordon . . . left. He had heard of a law restraining the sale of patent medicines, of Snibbs's Mixture, and what the local drinkers would do, already deprived of the more legitimate forms of spirituous refreshment, was difficult to say. The postmaster predicted they would take to "dope." Then there was to be a sap-boiling over on the western mountain, tomorrow night, at old man Entriken's. . . . Everybody had been invited; if the weather was ugly it would take place the first clear spell.

Sap-boilings, Gordon knew, held late in spring in the maple groves, lasted all night. Baskets of food were driven to the scene; the fires under the great iron kettles were kept replenished; everybody stirred the bubbling sap, ate, gabbled; the young people even danced on the grass.

It was a romantic ceremonial: the unusual hours of its celebration, the mystery of night in close groves lit by the stars, temporarily unsettled life from its prosaic, arduous journey toward the inevitable, blind termination. It moved the thoughts into unwonted fantasy, the heart to new, unguessed possibilities. For that night established values, life-long habits, negations, prudence, were set at naught.

Gordon wondered whether Meta Beggs would be there. He should like to be with her at a sap-boiling, in the sooty shadows. With the necklace of seed pearls in his pocket he walked over the street, revolving in his mind the problem of asking her to accompany him. He could not hope to hide it from Lettice; and, to-day, he had recognized a note

of finality in his wife's voice with regard to the school-teacher. If he went with Meta Beggs, serious trouble would ensue in his home. . . . He wished to avoid any actual outbreak with Lettice. He remembered, tardily, her condition; it would be dangerous for her. He might, conceivably, at some time or other, go away; even to Paris—yet, at that latter thought, the wish, almost the necessity, of a return lingered at the back of his brain—but he would not goad her into an explosion of misery and temper. He acknowledged to himself, with a faint glow of pride, that he was not anxious to encounter Lettice Makimmon's full displeasure; she possessed the capability of tenacity, an iron-like resolve, inherited from old Pompey.

In the outcome his difficulty was unexpectedly solved for him—a large farm wagon, with boards temporarily laid from side to side, was to convey a quantity of people, and among them Meta Beggs, from the village to the sap-boiling. He learned this from the idlers before the *Bugle* office. Sitting with his chair canted against that dingy wooden façade, he thought of the school-teacher and the coming night. It was late afternoon of the day on which he had bought the necklace. The small package still rested in his pocket. It had been his intention to give the pearls to Meta Beggs before he returned to his home, but no opportunity had offered. After school she had passed the seated row of men, uneasily stirring their hats in response to her collected greeting, and, with Mrs. Peterman, gone into the body of the hotel. Gordon could not follow her. Anyhow, the presentation could be made with better effect in the obscurity of the maples to-

morrow night . . . her gratitude could have fuller sweep.

He made his way finally, reluctantly, home. There, alone in the bedroom, he swiftly withdrew the necklace from its pasteboard box and dropped it into the pocket of a coat hanging in the curtained wardrobe. It was, he noted, the checked suit with the red thread, the one he would wear to the sap-boiling. He heard approaching footsteps, and, hastily crumpling the paper and small box into a compact unit, he flung it into a corner of the wardrobe, behind a heap of linen.

XV

It was comparatively a short distance to the elder Entriken's farm, and, rather than invent a laborious explanation of the horse's absence all night, Gordon walked. Numberless excuses offered him plausible reason for his own delayed return home. It was better to say nothing to Lettice of his actual intention; she was already suspicious of his sudden interest in local gatherings.

The road beyond Greenstream village crossed a brook and mounted by sharp turns the western range. The day had faded to amethyst, pale in the translucent vault of the sky, deepening in the valley; the plum-coloured smoke of evening fires ascended in tenuous columns to an incredible height. He walked rapidly, with the oppressed heart that had lately grown familiar, the sense of imminence, the feeling of advancing into a vague, towering shadow. That last sensation was at once new and familiar—where before had he been conscious of a vast, indefinable peril, blacker than night, looming implacably before him? He summoned his old hardihood and advanced over the still, bosky side of the mountain.

He descended, beyond the ridge, into the fact of evening accomplished. At the base of the range he crossed a softly-swelling expanse of close-cropped

grass, skirted a bog and troop of naked-seeming birches, and came in view of the maple grove toward which he was bound.

The maple trees towered compact and majestic over the level sod, holding their massed foliage black against the green sky. Low in the right the new moon hung like a gold fillet above the odorous, crepuscular earth; and, at the base of the trees, the fires were like bubbling crimson sealing wax poured into the deeper indigo gloom.

As Gordon advanced he saw a number of vehicles, from which the horses had been taken and tied to an improvised railing. Figures moved darkly against the flames; beyond, familiar features flickered like partial, painted masks on the night. In the grove the sap, stirred in the great iron kettles, kept up a constant choking minor; the smooth trunks of the trees swept up from the unsteady radiance into the obscurity of invisible branches looped with silver strings of stars.

Blurred forms moved everywhere. He searched for Meta Beggs. She was not by the kettles of sap; beyond the trees, by covered baskets of provisions, lanterns made a saffron pool of light, but she was not there. He felt in his pocket the cool, sinuous necklace. Finally he found her; or, rather, she slipped illusively into his contracted field of vision.

"You didn't tell me you were coming," she reproached him.

She wore a red dress, purple in the night, with a narrow black velvet ribband pinned about her throat; her straw hat was bound in red. She gained an extraordinary potency from the dark; it almost seemed to Gordon Makimmon that her skin had a

luminous quality; he could see her pointed hands distinctly, and her small, cold face. All her dresses strained about her provocative body, an emphasis rather than a covering of her slim maturity. They drifted, without further speech, out of the circles of wavering light, into the obscurity beyond.

They sat, resting against a hillock of sod, facing the sinking visible rim of the moon. From the bog the frogs sounded like a continuously and lightly-struck xylophone. Meta Beggs shivered.

"I'll go mad here," she declared, "in this—this nothingness. Look—the moon dropping into wilderness; other lucky people are watching it disappear behind great houses and gardens; women in the arms of their lovers are watching it through silk curtains."

He gazed critically over the valley, the mountains, into the sky scarfed by night. "I'm used to it," he returned; "it doesn't bother me like it does you. Some people even like it. A man who came here from the city to die of lung trouble sat for weeks looking up Greenstream valley; he couldn't get enough, morning or evening."

"But I don't want to die, I want to live. I'm going to live, too; I've decided——"

"What?"

"To stop teaching. When the term's over, in a few weeks, I'm going to take the money I make and go to New York. It will be just enough to get me there and buy me a pretty hat, with a few dollars over. I am going with those into a café and get a bottle of champagne, and pick out the man with the best clothes. I'll tell him I'm a poor school-teacher from the South who came to New York to

meet a man who promised to marry me, but who had not kept his word. I'll tell him that I'm good—I can, you know; no man has ever fooled anything out of me—and that I bought wine to get the courage to kill myself."

"It sounds right smart," he admitted; "you can do it, too; you can lie like hell. But," he added importantly, "I don't know that I will let you." This, he assured himself, was purely experimental. He had decided nothing; his course in the future was hidden from him absolutely. He thought discontentedly of his home, of the imagined long, dun vista of years.

He was now, he realized dimly, at the crucial point of his existence; with Meta Beggs, in that world of which Paris was the prefigurement, he might still wring from life a measure of the sharp pleasures of tempestuous youth and manhood; he might still dance to the piping of the senses. With Lettice in Greenstream he would rapidly sink into the dullness of increasing age.

He was vaguely conscious of the baseness of the mere weighing of such a choice; but he was engulfed in his overmastering egotism; his sense of obligation was dulled by the supreme selfishness of a life-time, of a life-time of unbridled temper and appetite, of a swaggering self-esteem which the remorseless operation of fate had ignored, had passed indifferently by, leaving him in complete ignorance of the terrible and grim possibilities of human mischance.

He had suffered at the loss of his dwelling, but principally it had been his pride that had borne the wound; Clare's death had affected him finally as the

arbitrary removal of a sentimental object for his care, on which to lavish the gifts of his large generosity.

He sat revolving in his mind the choice of paths which seemed to open for his decision in such different directions, which seemed to await the simple ordering of his footsteps as he chose. The night deepened to its darkest hour; the moon, in obedience to its automatic fixed course, had vanished behind the mountains; the frogs, out of their slime, raised their shrill plaint of life in death.

XVI

"I've got something for you," Gordon said suddenly.

"I hope it's pretty," she replied, leaning forward, resting against his shoulder.

He brought from his pocket the slender looped necklace of seed pearls. It was faintly visible in the dark; the diamond clasp made a small glint. She took it eagerly from him. "I'll light a match," he told her. In the minute orange radiance the pearls shimmered in her fingers.

"But it's wonderful!" she exclaimed, unable to suppress her surprise at his unerring choice; "it's exactly right. Have you been to Stenton? however could you get this here?"

"Oh, I know a few things," he assured her; "I got an eye. Let me put it on for you." He took it from her, and his hands fumbled about her smooth throat. He required a long time to fasten it. The intoxication of the subtlety of her sex welled from hand to head. He kissed her still lips until he ceased from sheer lack of breath. He drew her close to him, with an arm about her pliant waist.

"I've been thinking of you in those pretty clothes," he admitted.

"All lace and webby pink silk and ribbands underneath," she reminded him; "but only for you, and satin trains and diamonds for the others."

Her words winged like little flames into his imagination. He whispered in her ear, "Richmond." She stiffened in his arms as if that single word had the power to freeze her. "We'll see, we'll see," he added hastily, fearing to dispel her complacency. "Paris is a long way . . . a man could never come back."

"I didn't know you were so cautious," she challenged; "I thought you were bolder—that's your reputation in Greenstream, a bad one for a man or woman to cross."

"So I've been," he acknowledged; "I told you I wouldn't have hesitated a while back."

"What is holding you now—your wife? She would soon get over it. She's only a girl; she hasn't had enough experience to hold a man. Besides, she must know by now that you only married her for money; she must know you don't care for her; women always find out."

The bald, incontestable statement of his reason for marrying Lettice disconcerted him. He had never made the acknowledgment of putting it into words to himself, and no one else had openly guessed, had dared. . . .

Suddenly it appeared to him in the light of a possible act of cowardice—Lettice, a girl, blinded by affection. And, equally, it was undeniably true that he did not care for her . . . he did not care for her? that realization too carried a slight sting. But neither did he care for Meta Beggs; something different attracted him to her; she—she brought him out, that was it; she ministered to his pleasure, his desire, his——

"Don't," she said firmly.

His balked feelings overmastered him, and he disregarded her prohibition. She slipped from his grasp, as lithely as the serpentine pearls had run through his fingers.

"Haven't you learned," she demanded, standing, "that I can't be bought with silk stockings or a little necklace? Or, perhaps, you are cheap, and I have been entirely wrong. . . . I'm going to get something to eat, with the people who brought me from Greenstream. I will be back here in two hours, but it will be for the last time. You must decide one way or the other while I am gone. You may stay or leave; I'm going to leave. Remember—no more penny kisses, no more meetings like this; it must be all or nothing. Some man will take me to Paris, have me." She dissolved against the dark of the maple grove.

XVII

But, curiously, sitting alone, he gave little consideration to the decision, immediate and irrevocable, which confronted him. His thoughts evaded, defied, him, retreated into night-like obscurity, returned burdened with trivial and unexpected details of memory. It grew colder; the rich monotone of mountain and sky changed to an impenetrable ugly density above which the constellations wheeled without colour. His back was toward the maple grove; the removed, disembodied voices mingled in a sound not more intelligible than the chorus of frogs. It occurred to him suddenly that, perhaps, in a week, a month, he might not be in Greenstream, nor in the mountains, but with the white body of Meta Beggs in the midst of one of those vast, fabulous cities, the lust of which possessed her so utterly. . . . Or she would be gone.

He thought instinctively of the little cemetery on the slope above the village. One by one that rocky patch was absorbing family and familiars. Life appeared to be a stumbling procession winding through Greenstream over the rise and sinking into that gaping, insatiable chasm. He was conscious of an invisible force propelling him into that sorry parade, toward those unpretentious stones marked with the shibboleth of names and dates. A des-

perate anxiety to evade this fate set his soul cowering in its fatal mask of clay. This, he realized, was unadulterated childish fear, and he angrily aroused himself from its stifling influence.

Meta Beggs would be back soon; she would require an answer to her resolve . . . all or nothing. The heat, chilled by the night and loneliness, faded a little from his blood. She demanded a great deal —a man could never return. He bitterly cursed his indecision. He became aware of a pervading weariness, a stiffness from his prolonged contact with the earth, and he rose, moved about. His legs were as rigid, as painful, as an old man's; he had been leaning on his elbow, and the arm was dead to the fingers. The nerves pricked and jerked in infinitesimal fiery agonies. He swung his arms, stamped his feet, aiding his stagnating circulation. The frogs ceased their complaint abruptly; the concerted jangle of voices in the grove rose and fell. The replenished fires poured their energy over the broad bottoms of the sap kettles.

The night faded.

The change, at first, was imperceptible: as always, the easterly mountains grew visible against a lighter sky. The foliage of the maples, stripped of the looping stars, took the form of individual branches brightening from black to green. There was a stir of dim figures about the impatient horses. Meta Beggs came swiftly to him. He could see her face plainly now, and was surprised at its strained, anxious expression. Her hand closed upon his arm, she drew him to her:

"Which?" she whispered.

"I don't know," he dully replied.

"Save me," she implored; "take me away." She whispered maddeningly in his ear, summoning the lust within him, the clamour in his brain, the throbbing in his throat, his wrists. He shut his eyes, and, when he opened them, the dawn had arrived. It forced her from him. Her gown changed to vivid red; about her throat the graceful pearls were faintly iridescent.

"I don't know," he repeated wearily.

Over her shoulder he saw a buggy approaching across the grass. It was disconcertingly familiar, until he recognized, beyond any doubt, that it was his own. Sim, he assured himself, had learned of his presence at the sap-boiling, and, in passing, had stopped to fetch him home. But there was no man in the buggy . . . only two women. Meta Beggs, intercepting his intent gaze, turned and followed it to its goal . . . Gordon saw now that Mrs. Caley was driving, and by her side . . . Lettice! Lettice —riding over the rough field, over the dark stony roads, when now, so soon . . . in her condition . . . it was insanity. Simeon Caley's wife should never have allowed it.

The horse, stolidly walking over the sod, stopped before them. Mrs. Caley held a rein in either hand; her head, framed in a rusty black bonnet and strings, was as dark, as immobile, as iron. Lettice gathered her shawl tightly about her shoulders; she had on a white waist, and her head was bare. She descended clumsily from the buggy and walked slowly up to Gordon. Her face was older than he had ever seen it, and pinched; in one hand she grasped a small pasteboard box.

XVIII

Gordon Makimmon made one step toward her. Lettice held the box in an extended hand:

"Gordon," she asked, "what was this for? It was in the clothes press last evening: it couldn't have been there long. You see—it's a little jewellery box from the post-office; here is the name on the lid. Somehow, Gordon, finding it upset me; I couldn't stop till I'd seen you and asked you about it. Somehow there didn't seem to be any time to lose. I asked for you last night in the village, but everybody had gone to the sap-boiling . . . I sat up all night . . . waiting . . . I couldn't wait any longer, Gordon, somehow. I had to come out and find you, and everybody had gone to the sap-boiling, and——"

"Why, Lettice," he stammered, more disconcerted by the sudden loss of youth from her countenance than by her words; "it wasn't—wasn't much."

"What was it, Gordon?" she insisted.

Suddenly he was unable to lie to her. Her questioning eyes held a quality that dispelled petty and casual subterfuges. The evasion which he summoned to his lips perished silently.

"A string of pearls," he muttered.

"Why did you crush the pretty box if they were

for—for me or for your sister, if it was to be a surprise? I can't understand——"

"It, it was——"

"Who were they for, Gordon?"

A blundering panic swept over him; Lettice was more strange than familiar; she was unnatural; her hair didn't shine in the sunlight streaming into the shallow green basin; in the midst of the warm efflorescence she seemed remote, chill.

"For her." He moved his head toward Meta Beggs.

She withdrew her burning gaze from Gordon Makimmon and turned to the school-teacher.

"For Miss Beggs," she repeated; "why . . . why, that's bad, Gordon. You're married to me; I'm your wife. Miss Beggs oughtn't . . . she isn't anything to you."

Meta Beggs stood motionless, silent, her red cotton dress drawing and wrinkling over her rounded shoulders and hips. The necklace hung gracefully about the slender column of her throat.

The two women standing in the foreground of Gordon Makimmon's vision, of his existence, summed up all the eternal contrast, the struggle, in the feminine heart. And they summed up the duplicity, the weakness, the sensual and egotistical desires, the power and vanity and vain-longing, of men.

Meta Beggs was the mask, smooth and sterile, of the hunger for adornment, for gold bands and jewels and perfume, for goffered linen and draperies of silk and scarlet. She was the naked idler stained with antimony in the clay courts of Sumeria; the Paphian with painted feet loitering on the roofs of

Memphis while the blocks of red sandstone floated sluggishly down the Nile for the pyramid of Khufu the King; she was the flushed voluptuousness relaxed in the scented spray of pagan baths; the woman with piled and white-powdered hair in a gold shift of Louis XIV.; the prostitute with a pinched waist and great flowered sleeves of the Maison Dorée. She was as old as the first vice, as the first lust budding like a black blossom in the morbidity of men successful, satiated.

She was old, but Lettice was older.

Lettice was more ancient than men walking cunning and erect, than the lithe life of sun-heated tangles, than the vital principle of flowering plants fertilized by the unerring chance of vagrant insects and airs.

Standing in the flooding blue flame of day, they opposed to each other the forces fatally locked in the body of humanity. Lettice, with her unborn child, her youth haggard with apprehension and pain, the prefigurement of the agony of birth, gazed, dumb and bitter in her sacrifice, at the graceful cold figure that, as irrevocably as herself, denied all that Lettice affirmed, desired all that she feared and hated.

"Why, that's bad, Gordon," she reiterated. "I'm your wife. And Miss Beggs is bad, I'm certain of that." A spasm of suffering crossed her face like a cloud.

"You ought not to have come, Lettice. Lettice, you ought not to have come," he told her. His dull voice reflected the lassitude that had fallen upon him, the sudden death of all emotion, the swift extinguishing of his interest in the world about him; it

reflected, in his indifference to desire, an indifference to Meta Beggs.

"Do you love her, Gordon?" his wife asked.

"No, I don't," he answered, perceptibly impatient at the question.

"Do you like her better than you like me?"

The palpable answer to her query, that he thought of himself more than either, evaded him. "I don't like her better than I like you," he repeated baldly.

Lettice turned to the other woman. "There's not much you can say," she declared—"caught like this trying to steal somebody's husband. And you set over a school of children!"

"I don't choose to be," Meta Beggs retorted. "I hate it, but I had to live. If you hadn't had all that money to keep you soft, yes, and get you a husband, you would have had to fight and do, too. You might have been teaching a roomful of little sneaks, and sick to death of it before ever you began . . . or you might be on the street—better girls have than you."

"And you bought her a necklace, Gordon, her——"

All that he now desired was to get Lettice safely home. Another wave of pain rose whitely over her countenance. "Come on, Lettice," he urged; "just step into the buggy." He waved toward the vehicle, toward the peacefully grazing horse, Mrs. Caley sitting upright and sallow.

"And take him right along with you," Meta Beggs added; "your money's tight around his neck."

Resentment at the implied ignominy penetrated his self-esteem.

"We're going right on now, Lettice," he continued; "we must drive as careful as possible."

"I don't know that I want you," his wife articulated slowly.

"You can decide that later," he returned; "we're going home first."

She relaxed her fingers and dropped the pasteboard box on the turf. She stood with her arms hanging limply, breathing in sharp inspirations. She gazed about at the valley, the half-distant maple grove: suddenly the youth momentarily returned to her, the frightened expression of a child abruptly conscious of isolation in an alien, unexpected setting.

"Gordon," she said rapidly, "I had to come—find you . . . something——" Her voice sharpened with apprehension. "Tell me it will be all right. It won't . . . kill me." She stumbled toward him; he caught her and half carried her to the buggy, where he lifted her over the step and into the seat. A red-clad arm was supporting her on the other side: it was Meta Beggs.

"You drive," he directed Mrs. Caley. He held Lettice with her face hidden against his shoulder. The valley was refulgent with early summer, the wheat was swelling greenly, the meadows, threaded by shining streams, were sown with flowers, grazed by herds of cattle with hides like satin, the pellucid air was filled with indefinite birdsong. The buggy lurched over a hillock of grass; his wife shuddered in his arms, and an unaccustomed, vicarious pain contracted his heart. Where the fields gave upon the road the buggy dropped sharply; Lettice cried out uncontrollably. He cursed Mrs. Caley savagely under his breath. "Can't you drive," he asked; "can't you?"

The ascent to the crown of the ridge was rough,

but beyond, winding down to the Greenstream valley, it was worse. The buggy, badly hitched, bumped against the flank of the horse, twisted over exposed boulders, brought up suddenly in the gutters cut diagonally by the spring torrents. Gordon Makimmon forgot everything else in the sole desire to get Lettice safely to their house. He endeavoured, by shifting her position, to reduce the jarring of the uneven progress. He realized that she was in a continual agony, and, in that new ability to share it through the dawning consciousness of its brute actuality in Lettice, it roused in him an impotent fury of rebellion. It took the form of an increasing passion of anger at the inanimate stones of the road, against Mrs. Caley's meagre profile on the dusty hood of the buggy. He whispered enraged oaths, worked himself into an insanity of temper. Lettice grew rigid in his arms. For a while she iterated dully, like the beating of a sluggish heart, "bad . . . bad . . . bad." Then dread wiped all other expression from her face; then, again, pain pinched her features.

The buggy creaked down the decline to their dwelling. Gordon supported Lettice to their room; then he stood on the porch without, waiting. The rugged horse, still hitched, snatched with coarse, yellow teeth at the grass. Suddenly Mrs. Caley appeared at a door: she spoke, breaking the irascible silence of months, dispelling the accumulating illwill of her pent resentment, with hasty, disjointed words:

". . . quick as you can . . . the doctor."

XIX

A HOARSE, thin cry sounded from within the Makimmon dwelling. It fluctuated with intolerable pain and died abruptly away, instantly absorbed in the brooding calm of the valley, lost in the vast, indifferent serenity of noon. But its echo persisted in Gordon's thoughts and emotions. He was sitting by the stream, before his house; and, as the cry had risen, he had moved suddenly, as though an invisible hand had touched him upon the shoulder. He sat reflected on the sliding water against the reflection of the far blue sky. One idea ran in a circle through his brain, his lips formed it soundlessly, he even spoke it aloud:

"It ain't as though I had gone," he said.

The possible consequence to Lettice of what had been a mere indecision seemed to him out of any proportion. No, he thought, I wouldn't have gone when the time came; when the minute came I'd have held back. Then again, it ain't as though I had gone. A species of surprise alternated with resentment at the gravity of the situation which had resulted from his indiscreet conduct; the agony of that cry from within the house was too deep to have proceeded from . . . it wasn't as though he had gone . . . he wouldn't have gone, anyway.

He heard footsteps on the porch, and turned,

recognizing Doctor Pelliter. He half rose to go to the other with an inquiry; but he dropped quickly back on the bank, looked away. Some time before, the doctor had tied a towel about his waist . . . it had been a white towel.

His mind returned to Lettice and the terrible mischance that had been brought upon her; that he had brought on her. He tested the latter clause, and attempted to reject it: he had done nothing to provoke such a terrible actuality. He rehearsed the entire chain of events which had resulted in the purchase of the pearl necklace; he followed it as far back as the evening when, from the minister's lawn, he had seen Meta Beggs undressing at her window. He could nowhere discover any desperate wrong committed. He knew men, plenty of them, who were actually unfaithful to their wives: he had done nothing of that sort. He endeavoured to grow infuriated with Meta Beggs, then with Mrs. Caley; he endeavoured to place upon them the responsibility for that attenuated, agonized sound from the house; but without success. He had made a terrible blunder. But, in a universe where the slightest fairness ruled, he and not Lettice would pay for an error purely his own.

Lettice was so young, he realized suddenly.

He recalled her as she sat alone, under the lamp, with her shawl about her shuddering shoulders, waiting for the inevitable, begging him to assure her that it would be all right. It would, of course, be all right in the end. It must! Then things would be different. He made himself no extravagant promises of reform, no fevered reproaches; but things would be different. He would take Lettice

driving; he had the prettiest young wife in Greenstream, and he would show people that he realized it. She had been Lettice Hollidew, the daughter of old Pompey, the richest man in the county.

The importance of that latter fact had dimmed; the omnipotence of money had dwindled: for instance, any conceivable sum would be powerless to still that cry from within. In a way it had risen from the very fact of Pompey Hollidew's fortune—Meta Beggs would never have considered him aside from it. He endeavoured to curse the old man's successful avarice, but without any satisfaction. Every cause contributing to the present impending catastrophe led directly back to himself, to his indecision. The responsibility, closing about him, seemed to shut out the air from his vicinity, to make laboured his breathing. He put out a hand, as though to ward off the inimical forces everywhere pressing upon him. He had seen suffering before —what man had not ?—but this was different; this unsettled the foundations of his being; it found him vulnerable where he had never been vulnerable before; he shrunk from it as he would shrink from touching a white-hot surface. He was afraid of it.

He thought of the ghastly activities inside the house; they haunted him in confused, horrid details amid which Lettice suffered and cried out.

He was unaware of the day wheeling splendidly through its golden hours, of the sun swinging across the narrow rift of the valley. At long intervals he heard muffled hoof-beats passing on the dusty road above. He watched a trout slip lazily out from under the bank and lie headed upstream, slowly

waving its fins. It recalled the trout he had left on the porch of Hollidew's farmhouse on the night when he had attempted to . . . seduce . . . Lettice!

The details of that occasion returned, vivid, complete, unsparing. It was a memory profoundly regrettable because of an obscure connection with Lettice's present danger; it too—although he was unable to discover why it should—took on the dark aspect of having helped to bring the other about. As the memory of that night recurred to him he became conscious of an obscure, traitorous force lurking within him, betraying him, leading his complacency into foolish and fatal paths, into paths which totally misrepresented him. . . . He would not really have gone away with Meta Beggs.

He was a better man than all this would indicate! Yet—consider the result; he might as well have committed a foul crime. But, in the end, it would be all right. Doctors always predicted the darkest possibilities.

He turned and saw Doctor Pelliter striding up the slope to where his team was hitched on the public road. A swift resentment swept over Gordon Makimmon as he realized that the other had purposely avoided him. He rose to demand attention, to call; but, instinctively, he stifled his voice. The doctor stopped at the road, and saw him. Gordon waved toward the house, and the other nodded curtly.

XX

He passed through the dining-room to the inner doorway, where he brushed by Mrs. Caley. Her face was as harsh and twisted as an old root. He proceeded directly to the bed.

"Lettice," he said; "Lettice."

Then he saw the appalling futility of addressing that familiar name to the strange head on the pillow.

Lettice had gone: she had been destroyed as utterly as though a sinister and ruthless magic had blasted every infinitesimal quality that had been hers. A countenance the colour of glazed white paper seemed to hold pools of ink in the hollows of its eyes. The drawn mouth was the colour of stale milk. Nothing remained to summon either pity or sorrow. The only possible emotion in the face of that revolting human disaster was an incredulous and shocked surprise. It struck like a terrible jest, a terrible, icy reminder, into the forgetful warmth of living; it mocked at the supposed majesty of suffering, tore aside the assumed dignity, the domination, of men; it tampered ferociously with the beauty, the pride, the innocent and gracious pretensions, of youth, of women.

Gordon Makimmon was conscious of an overwhelming desire to flee from the white grimace on

the bed that had been Lettice's and his. He drew back, in a momentary abject, shameful, cowardice; then he forced himself to return. . . . The fleering lips quivered, there was a slight stir under the counterpane. A little sound gathered, shaped into words barely audible in the stillness of the room broken only by Gordon's breathing:

"It's . . . too much. Not any more . . . hurting. Oh! I can't——"

He found a chair, and sat down by her side. The palms of his hands were wet, and he wiped them upon his knees. His fear of the supine figure grew, destroying the arrogance of his manhood, his sentient reason. He was afraid of what it intimated, threatened, for himself, and of its insupportable mockery. He felt as an animal might feel, cornered by a hugely grim and playful cruelty.

The westering sun fell through a window on the disordered huddle of Lettice's hastily discarded clothes streaming from a chair to the floor—her stockings, her chemise threaded with a narrow blue ribband. His thoughts turned to the little white garments she had fashioned in vain.

It had been wonderfully comfortable in the evening in the sitting-room with Lettice sewing. He recalled the time when he had first played the phonograph in order to hear the dog "sing." Lettice had cried out, imploring him to stop; well—he had stopped, hadn't he? The delayed realization of her patience of misery rankled like a barb. The wandering thoughts returned to the long fabrication he had told her of the loss of his money in Stenton, of the fictitious agent of hardware. He had snared the girl in a net of such lies; scornful of

Lettice's innocence, her "stupid" trust, he had brought her to this ruinous pass. It hadn't been necessary.

The window was open, and a breath of early summer drifted in—a breath of palpable sweetness. Mrs. Caley entered and bent over the bed, an angular black silhouette against the white. She went without a word.

If Lettice died, he, Gordon Makimmon, would have killed her, he had killed more . . . he recognized that clearly. The knowledge spread through him like a virus, thinning his blood, attacking his brain, his nerves. He lifted a shaking hand to wipe his brow; and, for a brief space, his arm remained in air; it looked as though he were gazing beneath a shielding palm at a far prospect. The arm dropped suddenly to his side, the fingers struck dully against the chair. He heard again the muffled beat of horses' hoofs on the road above; the sun moved slowly over the narrow gay strips of rag carpet on the floor: life went on elsewhere.

His fear changed to loathing, to absolute sick repulsion from all the facts of his existence. With the passing minutes the lines deepened on his haggard countenance, his expression perceptibly aged. The stubble of beard that had grown since the day before grizzled his lean jaw; the confident line of his shoulders, of his back, was bowed.

He looked up with a start to find the doctor once more in the room. He rose. "Doc," he asked in a strained whisper, "Doc, will it be all right?" He wet his lips. "Will she live?"

"You needn't whisper," the other told him; "she doesn't know . . . now. 'Will she live?' I can

only tell you that she wanted to die a thousand times."

Gordon turned away, looking out through the window. It gave upon the slope planted with corn; the vivid green shoots everywhere pushed through the chocolate-coloured soil; chickens were vigorously scratching in a corner. The shadow of the west range reached down and enfolded the Makimmon dwelling; the sky burned in a sulphur-yellow flame. When he turned the doctor had vanished, the room had grown dusky. He resumed his seat.

"I didn't do right," he acknowledged to the travesty on the bed; "there was a good bit I didn't get the hang of. It seems like I hadn't learned anything at all from being alive. I'm going to fix it up," he proceeded, painfully earnest. "I'm——" He broke off suddenly at the stabbing memory of the doctor's words, "She wanted to die a thousand times." He thought, I've killed her a thousand times already. The fear plucked at his throat. He rose and walked unsteadily to the door and out upon the porch.

The evening drew its gauze over the valley, the shrill, tenuous chorus of insects had begun for the night, the gold caps were dissolving from the eastern peaks. He saw Simeon Caley at the stable door; Sim avoided him, moving behind a corner of the shed. His pending sense of blood-guiltiness deepened. The impulse returned to flee, to vanish in the engulfing wild of the mountains. But he realized vaguely that that from which he longed to escape lay within him; he should carry it—the memories woven inexplicably of past and present, dominated by this last unforgettable spectre on the bed—into

the woods, the high, lonely clearings, the still valleys. It was not remorse now, it was not simple fear, but the old oppression, increased a thousandfold.

He sat in the low rocking chair that had held his mother and Clare, and, only yesterday, Lettice, and its rockers made their familiar tracking sound over the uneven boards of the porch. At this hour there was usually a stir and smell of cooking from the kitchen; but now the kitchen window was blank and still. Darkness gathered slowly about him; it obscured the black and white check, the red thread, of his suit; it flowed in about him and reduced him to the common greyness of the porch, the sod, the stream. It changed him from a man with a puzzled, seamed visage into a man with no especial perceptible features, and then into a shadow, an inconsequential blur less important than the supports for the wooden covering above.

XXI

After a while he rose, impelled once more within. A lamp had been lit in the bedroom, and, in its radiance, the countenance on the pillow glistened like the skin of a lemon. As before, Mrs. Caley left the room as he entered; and he thought that, as she passed him, she snarled like an animal.

He sat bowed by the bed. A moth perished in the flame of the lamp, and the light flickered through the room—it seemed that Lettice grimaced, but it was only the other. Her face had grown sharper: it was such a travesty of her that, somehow, he ceased to associate it with Lettice at all. Instead he began to think of it as something exclusively of his own making—it was what he had done with things, with life.

The sheet lay over the motionless body like a thin covering of snow on the turnings of the earth; it defined her breasts and a hip as crisply as though they were cut in marble effigy on a tomb of youthful dissolution. He followed the impress of an arm to the hand, and, leaning forward, touched it. A coldness seemed to come through the cover to his fingers. He let his hand stay upon hers—perhaps the warmth would flow back into the cold arm, the chill heart; perhaps he could give her some of his vitality. The possibility afforded him a meagre

comfort, instilled a faint glow into his benumbed being. His hand closed upon that covered by the linen like a shroud. He sat rigid, concentrated, in his effort, his purpose. The light flickered again from the fiery perishing of a second moth.

A strange feeling crept over him, a deepened sense of suspense, of imminence. He fingered his throat, and his hand was icy where it touched his burning face. He stood up in an increasing nameless disturbance.

A faint spasm crossed the drained countenance beneath him; the mouth fell open.

He knew suddenly that Lettice was dead.

There her clothes lay strewn on the chair and floor—the long, black stockings and the rumpled chemise strung with narrow blue ribband. She had worn them on her warm young body; she had tied the ribband in the morning and untied it at night, untied it at night . . . it was night now.

A slow, exhausted deliberation of mind and act took the place of his late panic. He smoothed the sheet where he had grasped her hand in the futile endeavour to instill into her some of his warmth. He gazed at her for a moment, at the shadows like pools of ink poured into the caverns of her eyes, at a glint of teeth no whiter than the rest, at the dark plait of her hair lying sinuously over the pillow. Then he went to the door:

"Mrs. Caley," he pronounced. The woman appeared in the doorway from the kitchen. "Mrs. Caley," he repeated, "Lettice is dead."

She started forward with a convulsive gasp, and he turned aside and walked heavily out on to the porch. He stood for a moment gazing absently into

the darkened valley, at the few lights of Greenstream village, the stars like clusters of silver grapes on high, ultra-blue arbours. The whippoorwills throbbed from beyond the stream, the stream itself whispered in a pervasive monotone. The first George Gordon MacKimmon, resting on the porch of his new house isolated in the alien wild, had heard the whippoorwills and the stream. Gordon's father had heard them just as he, the present Makimmon, heard them sounding in the night. But no other Makimmon would ever listen to the persistent birds, the eternal whisper of the water, because he, the last, had killed his wife . . . he had killed their child.

He trod down the creaking steps to the soft, fragrant sod and made his way to where a thread of light outlined the stable door. Sim was seated on a box, the lantern at his feet casting a pale flicker over his riven face and the horse muzzling the trough. Gordon sat down upon the broken chair.

"She's dead," he said, after a minute. Simeon Caley made no immediate reply, and he repeated in exactly the same manner:

"She's dead."

A sudden bitterness of contempt flamed in the other's ineffable blue eyes. "God damn you to hell!" he exclaimed; "now you got the money and nothing to hinder you."

His resentment vanished as quickly as it had appeared. He rose and picked up the lantern, and with their puny illumination they went out together into the dark.

PART III

I

On an afternoon of the second autumn following Lettice's death Gordon was fetching home a headstall resewn by Peterman. The latter, in a small shed filled with the penetrating odour of dressed leather at the back of the hotel, exercised the additional trade of saddler. General Jackson ambled at Gordon's heel.

The dog had grown until his shoulder reached the man's knee; he was compact and powerful, with a long, heavy jaw and pronounced grave whiskers; the wheaten colour of his legs and head had lightened, sharply defining the coarse black hair upon his back.

October was drawing to a close: the autumn had been dry, and the foliage was not brilliantly coloured, but exhibited a single shade of dusty brown that, in the sun, took the sombre gleams of clouded gold. It was warm still, but a furtive wind, stirring the dead leaves uneasily over the ground, was momentarily ominous, chill.

The limp rim of a felt hat obscured Gordon's features, out of the shadow of which protruded his lean, sharp chin. His heavy shoes, hastily scraped of mud, bore long cuts across the heels, and shapeless trousers, a coat with gaping pockets, hung loosely about his thin body and bowed

shoulders. He passed the idlers before the office of the *Bugle* with a scarcely perceptible nod; but, farther on, he stopped before a solitary figure advancing over the narrow footway.

It was Buckley Simmons. He was noticeably smaller since his injury at the camp meeting; he had shrivelled; his face was peaked and wrinkled like the face of a very old man; the shadows in the sunken cheeks did not resemble those on living skin, but were dry and dusty like the autumn leaves. His gaze was fixed upon the ground at his feet; but, as he drew up to Gordon, he raised his head.

Into the dullness of his eyes, his slack lips, crept a dim recognition; among the ashes of his consciousness a spark glowed—a single live coal of bitter hate.

"How are you, Buckley?" Gordon pronounced slowly.

The other's hands clenched as the wave of emotion crossed the blank countenance. Then the hands relaxed, the face was again empty. He continued, oblivious of Gordon's salutation, of his presence, upon his way.

Gordon Makimmon stood for a moment gazing after him. Then, as he turned, he saw that there was a small group of men on the Courthouse lawn; he saw the sheriff standing facing them from the steps, gesticulating.

II

THE purpose of this gathering was instantly evident to him; it stirred obscure memories into being. A property was being publicly sold for debt.

The trooping thoughts of the past filled his mind; thoughts, it seemed to him, of another than himself. Surely it had been another Gordon Makimmon that, sitting before the *Bugle* office, had heard the sheriff enumerating the scant properties of the old freehold by the stream to satisfy the insatiable greed of Valentine Simmons. It had been a younger man than himself by fifteen years. Yet, actually, it had been scarcely more than three years since the storekeeper had had him sold out.

That other Makimmon had been a man of incredibly vivid interests and emotions. Now it appeared to him that, in all the world, there was not a cause for feeling, not an incentive to rouse the mind from apathy.

Stray periods reached him from the sheriff's recounting of a "highly desirable piece of property." His loud, flat voice had not changed by an inflection since he had "called out" Gordon's home; the merely curious or materially interested onlookers were the same, the dragging bidding had, appar-

ently, continued unbroken from the other occasion. The dun, identical repetition added to the overwhelming sense of universal monotony in Gordon Makimmon's brain. He turned at the corner, by Simmons's store, while the memories faded; the customary greyness, like a formless drift of cloud obscuring a mountain height, once more descended upon him.

At the back of the store a small open space was filled with broken crates, straw, and boxes—the debris of unpacking. And there he saw a youthful woman sitting with her head turned partially from the road. As he passed a suppressed sob shook her. It captured his attention, and, with a slight, involuntary gasp, he saw her face. The memories returned in a tumultuous, dark tide—she reminded him vividly of Lettice. It was in the young curve of her cheeks, the blue of her eyes, and a sameness of rounded proportions, that the resemblance lay.

He stopped, without formulated reason, and in spite of her obvious desire for him to proceed.

"It's hardly fit to sit here and cry before the whole County," he observed.

"The whole County knows," she returned in the egotism of youthful misery.

Her voice, too, was like Lettice's—sweet with the premonition of the querulous note that, Rutherford Berry had once said, distinguished all good women.

A sudden intuition directed his gaze upon the Courthouse lawn.

"They're selling you out," he hazarded, "for debt."

She nodded, with trembling lips. "Cannon is," she specified.

Cannon was the storekeeper for whom his brother-in-law clerked. He thought again, how monotonous, how everlastingly alike, life was. "You just let the amount run on and on," he continued; "you got this and that. Then, suddenly, Cannon wanted his money."

Her eyes opened widely at his prescience. "But there was sickness too," she added; "the baby died."

"Ah!" Gordon said curtly. The lines in his worn face deepened, his mouth was inscrutable.

"If it hadn't been for that," she confided, "we could have got through. Everything had started fine. Alexander's father had left him the place: there isn't a better in the Bottom. Alexander says Mr. Cannon has always wanted it. Now . . . now . . ." Her blue gaze blurred with slow tears.

Her similarity to Lettice grew still more apparent—she presented the same order, her white shirtwaist had been crisply ironed, her shoes were rubbed bright and neatly tied. He recalled this similitude suddenly, and it brought before him a clearly defined vision of Lettice, not as his wife, but as the girl he had driven to and from the school at Stenton. He had not thought of that Lettice for months, for three years; not since before she had died; not, he corrected himself drearily, since he had killed her. He had remembered the last phase, of the glazed and bloodless travesty of her youth. But even that had lately been lost in the fog of nothingness settling down upon him.

And now this girl, on a box behind Simmons's store, brought the buried memories back into light. They disconcerted him, sweeping through the lassitude of his mind; they stirred shadowy spectres of fear. . . . The voice of the sheriff carried to them, describing the excellent repair of incidental sheds.

"I nailed all the tar-paper on the—the chicken house," she told him in a fresh accession of unhappiness, the tears spilling over her round flushed cheeks.

It annoyed him to see her cry: it was as though Lettice was suffering again from old misery. His irritation grew at this seeming renewal of what had gone; it assumed the aspect of an intentional reproach, of Lettice returned to bother him with her pain and death. He turned sharply to continue on his way. But, almost immediately, he stopped.

"Your name?" he demanded.

"Adelaide Crandall."

The Crandalls, he knew, were a reputable family living in the valley bottom east of Greenstream village. Matthew Crandall had died a few years before, and, as this girl had indicated, had left a substantial farm to each of his sons. Cannon would get this one and, it was more than probable, the others.

The old enmity against Valentine Simmons, directed at Cannon, flamed afresh. Simmons or the other—what did the name matter? they were the same, a figurative apple press crushing the juice out of the country, leaving but a mash of hopes and lives. He stood irresolute, while Adelaide Crandall fought to control her emotions.

The badgering voice of the sheriff sounded again on his hearing. He crossed the road, pushed open the grinding iron gate of the fence that enclosed the Courthouse lawn, and made his way through the sere fallen leaves to the steps.

III

"TWENTY-SEVEN hundred and ninety dollars," the sheriff reiterated; "only twenty-seven ninety . . . this fine bottom land, all cleared and buildings in best repair. Going! Going!"

"Three thousand," a man called from the group facing the columned portico.

"Three thousand! Three thousand! Sale must be made. Going——"

"Thirty-one hundred," Gordon pronounced abruptly.

A stir of renewed interest animated the sale. Gordon heard his name pronounced in accents of surprise. He was surprised at himself: his bid had been unpremeditated—it had leaped like a flash of ignited powder out of the resurrected enmity to Valentine Simmons, out of the memories stirred by the figure that resembled Lettice.

The sheriff immediately took up his bid. "Thirty-one hundred! thirty-one, gentlemen; only thirty-one for this fine bottom land, all cleared——"

There was a prolonged pause in the bidding, during which even the auctioneer grew apathetic. He repeated the assertion that the buildings were in the best repair; then, abruptly, concluded the sale. Gordon had purchased the farm for thirty-one hundred dollars.

He despatched, in the Courthouse, the necessary formalities. When he emerged the group on the lawn had dwindled to three people conversing intently. A young man with heavy shoulders already bowed, clad in unaccustomed, stiff best clothes, advanced to meet him.

"Mr. Makimmon," he began; "you got my place. . . . There's none better. I've put a lot of work into it. I'll—I'll get my things out soon's I can. If you can give me some time, my wife——"

"I can give you a life," Gordon replied brusquely. He walked past Alexander Crandall to his wife. She turned her face from him. He said:

"You go back to the Bottom. I've fixed Cannon . . . this time. Tell your husband he can pay me when it suits; the place is yours." He swung on his heel and strode away.

IV

THE fitful wind had, apparently, driven the warmth, the sun, from the earth. The mountains rose starkly to the slaty sky.

Gordon Makimmon lighted a lamp in the dining room of his dwelling. The table still bore a red fringed cloth, but was bare of all else save the castor, most of the rings of which were empty. The room had a forlorn appearance, there was dust everywhere; Gordon had pitched the headstall into a corner, where it lay upon a miscellaneous, untidy pile.

"I reckon you want something to eat," he observed to General Jackson. He proceeded, followed by the dog, to the kitchen. It revealed an appalling disorder: the stove was spotted with grease, grey with settled ashes; a pile of ashes and broken china rose beyond; on the other side coal and wood had been carelessly stored. A table was laden with unwashed dishes, unsavoury pots, crusted pans.

Gordon stood in the middle of the floor, a lamp in his hand, surveying the repellent confusion. It had accumulated without attracting his notice; but now, suddenly detached from the aimless procession of the past months, it was palpable to him, unendurable. "It's not fit for a dog," he pronounced.

An expression of determination settled on his

seamed countenance; he took off his coat and hung it on a peg in the door. Outside, by an ash-pit, he found a bucket and half-buried shovel. A minute afterward the kitchen was filled with grey clouds as he shovelled the ashes into the bucket for removal. He worked vigorously, and the pile soon disappeared; the wood and coal followed, carried out to where a bin was built against the house. Then he raked the fire from the stove.

It was cold within, but Gordon glowed with the heat of his energy. He filled a basin with water, and, with an old brush and piece of sandsoap, attacked the stove. He scrubbed until the surface exhibited a dull, even black; then, in a cupboard, he discovered an old box of stove polish, and soon the iron was gleaming in the lamplight. He laid and lit a fire, put on a tin boiler of water for heating, and then carried all the movables into the night; after which he fed General Jackson.

He flooded the kitchen floor and scrubbed and scraped until the boards were immaculate. Then, with a wet towel about a broom, he cleaned the walls and ceiling; he washed the panes of window glass. The dishes followed; they were dried and ranged in rigid rows on the dresser; the pots were scoured and placed in the closets underneath. Now, he thought vindictively, when he had finished, the kitchen would suit even Sim Caley's wife—the old vinegar bottle.

The Caleys had left his house the morning following Lettice's funeral. Mrs. Caley had departed without a word; Sim with but a brief, awkward farewell. Since then Gordon had lived alone in the house; but he now realized that it was

not desirable, practicable. Things, he knew, would soon return to the dirt and disorder of a few hours ago. He needed some one, a woman, to keep the place decent. His necessity recalled the children of his sister. . . . There was only Rose; the next girl was too young for dependence. Rose had been married a year now, and had a baby. Her husband had been in the village only the week before in search of employment, which he had been unable to secure, and it was immaterial where in the County they lived.

V

The couple grasped avidly at the opportunity to live with him. The youth had already evaporated from Rose's countenance; her minute mouth and constantly lifted eyebrows expressed an inwardly gratifying sense of superiority, an effect strengthened by her thin, affected speech. Across her narrow brow a fringe of hair fell, which she was continually crimping with an iron heated in the kitchen stove, permeating the room with a lingering and villainous odour of burned hair.

William Vibard was a man with a passion—the accordion. He arrived with the instrument in a glossy black paper box, produced it at the first opportunity, and sat by the stove drawing it out to incredible lengths in the production of still more incredible sounds. He held one box-like end, with its metallic stops, by his left ear, while his right hand, unfalteringly fixed in the strap of the other end, operated largely in the region of his stomach.

He had a book of instructions and melodies printed in highly simplified and explanatory bars, which he balanced on his knee while he struggled in their execution.

He was a youth of large, palpable bones, joints, and knuckles; his face was long and preternaturally pale, and bore an abstracted expression which

deepened almost to idiocy when bent above the quavering, unaccountable accordion.

The Vibard baby was alarmingly little, with a bluish face; and, as if in protest against her father's interminable noise, lay wrapped in a knitted red blanket without a murmur, without a stir of her midgelike form, hour upon hour.

VI

Some days after the Vibards' arrival Gordon Makimmon was standing by the stable door, in the crisp flood of midday, when an ungainly young man strode about the corner of the dwelling and approached him.

"You're Makimmon," he half queried, half asserted. "I'm Edgar Crandall, Alexander's brother." He took off his hat, and passed his hand in a quick gesture across his brow. He had close-cut vivid red hair bristling like a helmet over a long, narrow skull, and a thrusting grey gaze. "I came to see you," he continued, "because of what you did for Alec. I can't make out just what it was; but he says you saved his farm, pulled it right out of Cannon's fingers, and that you've given him all the time he needs to pay it back——" He paused.

"Well," Gordon responded, "and if I did?"

"I studied over it at first," the other frankly admitted; "I thought you must have a string tied to something. I know Alexander's place; it's a good farm, but . . . I studied and studied until I saw there couldn't be more in it than what appeared. I don't know why——"

"Why should you?" Gordon interrupted brusquely, annoyed by this searching into the reason for his purchase of the farm, into the region of his memories.

"I didn't come here to ask questions," the other quickly assured him; "but to borrow four thousand dollars."

"Why not forty?" Gordon asked dryly.

"Because I couldn't put it out at profit, now." Edgar Crandall ignored the other's factitious manner: "But I can turn four over two or three times in a reasonable period. I can't give you any security—everything's covered I own; that's why I came to you."

"You heard I was a fool with some money?"

"You didn't ask any security of Alexander," he retorted. "No, I came to you because there was something different in what you did from all I had ever known before. I can't tell what I mean; it had a—well, a sort of big indifference about it. It seemed to me perhaps life hadn't got you in the fix it had most of us; that you were free."

"You must think I'm free—with four thousand dollars."

"Apples," the other continued resolutely. "I've got the ground, acres of prime sunny slope. I've read about apple growing and talked to men who know. I've been to Albemarle County. I can do the same thing in the Bottom. Ask anybody who knows me if I'll work. I can pay the money back all right. But, if I know you from what you did, that's not the thing to talk about now.

"I want a chance"—he drove a knotted fist into a hardened palm—"I want a chance to bring out what's in me and in my land. I want my own! The place came to me clear, with a little money; but I wasn't content with a crop of fodder. I improved and experimented with the soil till I found out what

was in her. Now I know; but I can't plant a sapling, I can't raise an apple, without binding myself to the Cannons and Hollidews of the county for life.

"I'd be their man, growing their fruit, paying them their profits. They would stop at the fence, behind their span of pacers, and watch me—their slave—sweating in the field or orchard."

"You seem to think," Gordon observed, "that you ought to have some special favour, that what grinds other men ought to miss you. Old Pompey sold out many a better man, and grabbed richer farms. And anyhow, if I was to money all that Cannon and Valentine Simmons got hold of, where would I be? Here's two of you in one family, in no time at all. . . . If that got about I'd have five hundred breaking the door in."

The animation died from Edgar Crandall's face; he pulled his hat over the flaming helmet of hair. "I might have known such things ain't true," he said; "it was just a freak that saved Alec. There's no chance for a man, for a living, in these dam' mountains. They look big and open and free, but Greenstream's the littlest, meanest place on the earth. The paper-shavers own the sky and air. Well, I'll let the ground rot; I won't work my guts out for any one else."

He turned sharply and disappeared about the corner of the dwelling. Gordon moved to watch him stride up the slope to where a horse was tied by the public road. Crandall swung himself into the saddle, brought his heels savagely into the horse's sides, and clattered over the road.

Gordon Makimmon's annoyance quickly evapo-

rated; he thought with a measure of amusement of the impetuous young man who was not content to grow a crop of fodder. If the men of Greenstream all resembled Edgar Crandall, he realized, the Cannons would have an uneasy time. He thought of the brother, Alexander, of Alexander's wife, who resembled Lettice, and determined to drive soon to the Bottom and see them and the farm. He would have to make a practicable arrangement with regard to the latter, secure his intention, avoid question, by a nominal scheme of payment.

VII

He knew, generally, where Alexander Crandall's farm lay; and, shortly after, he drove through the village and mounted the road over which plied the Stenton stage. In the Bottom, beyond the east range, he went to the right and passed over an ill-defined way with numerous and deep fords. It was afternoon; an even, sullen expanse of cloud hid the deeps of sky through which the sun moved like a newly-minted silver dollar. A sharp wind drew through the opening; the fallen leaves rose from the road in sudden agitated whirling; the gaunt branches, printed sharply on the curtain of cloud, revealed the deserted nests of past springs.

He drove by solitary farms, their acres lying open and dead among the brush, and stopped, undecided, before a fenced clearing that swept back to the abrupt wall of the range, against which a low house was scarcely distinguishable from the sere, rocky ascent. Finally he drove in, over a faintly marked track, past a corner of the fence railed about a trough for sheep shearing, to the house. A pine tree stood at either side of the large uncut stone at the threshold; except for a massive exterior chimney the sombrely painted frame structure was without noticeable feature.

He discovered immediately from the youthful

feminine figure awaiting him at the door that he was not at fault. Mrs. Crandall's face radiated her pleasure.

"Mr. Makimmon!" she cried; "there's just no one we'd rather see than you. Step right out, and Alexander'll take your horse. He's only at the back of the house. . . . Alec!" she called; "Alec, what do you suppose?—here's Mr. Makimmon."

Alexander Crandall quickly appeared, in a hide apron covered with curlings of wood. A slight concern was visible upon his countenance, as though he expected at any moment to see revealed the "string" of which his brother had spoken.

Gordon adequately met his salutation, and turned to the woman. He saw now that she was more mature than Lettice: the mouth before him, although young and red, was bitten in at the corners; already the eyes gazed through a shadow of care; the capable hands were rough and discoloured from toil and astringent soaps.

"Come in, come in," Crandall urged, striving to banish the sudden anxiety from his voice.

"And you go right around, Alec," his wife added, "and twist the head off that dominicker chicken. Pick some flat beans too; there's a mess still hanging on the poles. Go in, Mr. Makimmon."

He was ushered into the ceremonious, barely-furnished best room. There was a small rag carpet at the door, with an archaic woven animal, and at its feet an unsteady legend, "Mary's Little Lamb"; but the floor was uncovered, and the walls, sealed in resinous pine, the pine ceiling, gave the effect, singular and depressing, of standing inside a huge box.

"It's mortal cold here," Mrs. Crandall truthfully observed; "the grate's broken. If you wouldn't mind going out into the kitchen——"

In the kitchen, from a comfortable place by the fire, Gordon watched her deft preparations for an early supper. Crandall appeared with the picked dominicker, and sat rigidly before his guest.

"I don't quite make out," he at last essayed, "how you expect your money, what you want out of it."

"I don't want anything out of it," Gordon replied with an almost bitter vigour; "leastways not any premium. I said you could pay me when you liked. I'll deed you the farm, and we'll draw up a paper to suit—to suit crops."

The apprehension in Alexander Crandall's face turned to perplexed relief. "I don't understand," he admitted; "but I haven't got to. It's enough to know that you pulled us out of ruination. Things will come right along now; we can see light; I'm extending the sheep-cots twice."

Supper at an end, he too launched upon the lack of opportunity in Greenstream. "Some day," he asserted, "and not so far off either, we'll shake off the grip of these blood-money men; we'll have a state lawed bank, a rate of interest a man can carry without breaking his back. There's no better land than the Bottom, or the higher clearings for grazing . . . it's the men, some of 'em. . . ."

VIII

It was dark when Gordon closed the stable door and turned to his dwelling. A light streamed from a chink in the closed kitchen shutter like a gold arrow shot into the night. From within came the long-drawn quaver of William Vibard's performance of the Arkansas Traveller. He was sitting bowed over the accordion, his jaw dropped, his eyes glazed with the intoxication of his obsession. Rose was rigidly upright in a straight chair, her hands crossed at the wrists in her meagre lap.

The fluctuating, lamentable sounds of the instrument, Rose's expression of conscious virtue, were suddenly petty, exasperating; and Gordon, after a short acknowledgment of their greeting, proceeded through the house to the sitting-room beyond.

No fire had been laid in the small air-tight stove; the room had a closed, musty smell, and was more chill than the night without; his breath hung before him in a white vapour. Soon he had wood burning explosively; the stove grew rapidly red hot and the chill vanished. He saw, beyond the lamp with its shade of minute, variously-coloured silks, the effigy of Mrs. Hollidew dead. Undisturbed in the film of dust that overlaid the table stood a pink celluloid thimble . . . Lettice had placed it there. . . .

His thoughts turned to Alexander Crandall and

his wife, to the extended sheep-cots, and the "light" which they now saw. He recalled the former's assertion that the land was all right, but that the blood-money men made life arduous in Greenstream. He remembered Edgar Crandall's arraignment of the county as "the littlest, meanest place on earth," a place where a man who wanted his own, his chance, was helpless to survive the avarice of a few individuals, the avarice for gold. He had asked him, Gordon Makimmon, to give him that chance. But, obviously, it was impossible . . . absurd.

His memory drifted back to the evening in the store when Valentine Simmons had abruptly demanded payment of his neglected account, to the hopeless rage that had possessed him at the realization of his impotence, of Clare's illness. That scene, that bitter realization of ruin, had been repeated across the breadth of Greenstream. As a boy he had heard men in shaking tones curse Pompey Hollidew; only last week the red-headed Crandall had sworn he would let his ground rot rather than slave for the breed of Cannon. It was, apparently, a perpetual evil, an endless burden for the shoulders of men momentarily forgetful or caught in a trap of circumstance.

Yet he had, without effort, without deprivation, freed Alexander Crandall. He could have freed his brother, given him the chance his rebellious soul demanded, with equal ease. He had not done that last, he had said at the time, because of the numbers that would immediately besiege him for assistance. This, he realized, was not a valid objection—the money was his to dispose of as he saw fit. He pos-

sessed large sums lying at the Stenton banks, automatically returning him interest, profit; thrown in the scale, their weight would go far toward balancing the greed of Valentine Simmons, of Cannon.

He considered these facts totally ignorant of the fact that they were but the reflection of his own inchoate need, born in the anguish of his wife's death; he was not conscious of the veering of his sensibility—sharpened by the hoarse cry from the stiffening lips of Lettice—to the world without. He thought of the possibility before him as a scheme of neither philanthropy nor revenge, nor of rehabilitation. He considered it solely in the light of his own experience, as a practical measure to give men their chance, their own, in Greenstream. The cost to himself would be small—his money had faded from his conceptions, his necessities, as absolutely as though it had been fairy gold dissolved by the touch of a magic wand. He had never realized its potentiality; lately he had ignored it with the contempt of supreme indifference. Now an actual employment for it occupied his mind.

The stove glowed with calorific energy; General Jackson, who had been lying at his feet, moved farther away. The lamplight grew faint and reddish, and then expired, trailing a thin, penetrating odour. In the dark the heated cylinder of the stove shone rosy, mysterious.

Gordon Makimmon was unaware of his own need; yet, at the anticipation of the vigorous course certain to follow a decision to use his money in opposition to the old, established rapacious greed, he was conscious of a sudden tightening of his mental and physical fibres. The belligerent blood

carried by George Gordon MacKimmon from world-old wars, from the endless strife of bitter and rugged men in high, austere places, stirred once more through his relaxed and rusting being.

He thought, aglow like the stove, of the struggle that would follow such a determination, a struggle with the pink fox, Valentine Simmons. He thought of himself as an equal with the other; for, if Simmons were practised in cunning, if Simmons were deep, he, Gordon Makimmon, would have no necessity for circuitous dealing; his course would be simple, unmistakable. He would lend money at, say, three per cent., grant extensions of time wherever necessary, and knock the bottom out of the storekeepers' usurious monopoly, drag the farms out of Cannon's grasping fingers.

"By God!" he exclaimed, erect in the dark; "but Edgar Crandall will get his apples."

The dog licked his hand, faithful, uncomprehending.

IX

On an afternoon of mid-August Gordon was sitting in the chamber of his dwelling that had been formerly used as dining-room. The table, bare of the castor and the red cloth, held an inkpot, pens upright in a glass of shot, and torn envelopes on an old blotter. An iron safe stood against the wall at Gordon's back, and above it hung a large calendar, advertising the Stenton Realty and Trust Company.

A sudden gloom swept over the room, and Gordon rose, proceeded to the door. A bank of purple cloud swept above the west range, opened in the sky like a gigantic, menacing fist; the greenery of the valley was overcast, and a white flash of lightning, accompanied by a shattering peal of thunder, stabbed viciously at the earth. There was no rain. An edge of serene light followed in the west a band of saffron radiance that widened until the cloud had vanished beyond the eastern peaks. The sultry heat lay like a blanket over Greenstream.

He turned back into the room, but, as he moved, he was aware of a figure at the porch door. It was a man with a round, freshly-coloured countenance, bland eyes, and a limp moustache, clad in leather boots and a worn corduroy gunning coat. Gordon nodded familiarly; it was the younger Entriken from the valley beyond.

"I came to see you about my note," he announced n a facile candour; "I sh'd take it up this month, but times are terrible bad, Gordon, and I wondered if you'd give me another extension? There's no real reason why you sh'd wait again; I reckon I could make her, but it would certainly be accommodating——" He paused interrogatively.

"Well——" Gordon hesitated. "I'm not in a hurry for the note, if it comes to that. But the fact is . . . I've got a lot of money laid out. What's been the matter?—the weather has been good, it's rained regular——"

"That's just it," Entriken interrupted; "it's rained too blamed regular. It is all right for crops, but we've got nothing besides cattle, and steers wouldn't hardly put on anything the past weeks. Of course, in a way, grass is cattle, but it just seems they wouldn't take any good in the wet."

"I suppose it will be all right," Gordon Makimmon assented; "but I can hardly have the money out so long . . . others too."

X

THE heat thickened with the dusk. The wailing clamour of William Vibard's accordion rose from the porch. Gordon had, of late, avoided sitting with Rose and her husband; they irritated him in countless insignificant ways. Rose's superiority had risen above the commonplace details of the house; she sat on the porch and regarded Gordon with a strained, rigid smile. After a pretence at procuring work William Vibard had relapsed into an endless debauch of sound. His manner became increasingly abstracted; he ate, he lived, with the gestures of a man playing an accordion.

The lines on Gordon's thin, dark face had multiplied; his eyes, in the shadow of his bony forehead, burned steady, pale blue; his chin was resolute; but a new doubt, a constant faint perplexity, blurred the line of his mouth.

From the road above came the familiar sound of hoofbeats, muffled in dust, but it stopped opposite his dwelling; and, soon after, the porch creaked under slow, heavy feet, and a thick black-clad figure knocked and entered.

It was the priest, Merlier.

In the past months Gordon had been conscious of an increasing concord with the silent clerical. He vaguely felt in the other's isolation the wreckage of an old catastrophe, a loneliness, not unlike his,

Gordon Makimmon's, who had killed his wife and their child.

"The Nickleses," the priest pronounced, sudden and harsh, "are worthless, woman and man. They would be bad if they were better; as it is, they are only a drunken charge on charity and the church. They have been stewed in whisky now for a month. They make nothing amongst their weeds. Is it possible they got a sum from you?"

"Six weeks back," Gordon replied briefly; "two hundred dollars to put a floor on the bare earth and stop a leaking roof."

"Lies," Merlier commented. "When any one in my church is deserving I will tell you myself. I think of an old woman now, but ten dollars would be a fortune." Silence fell upon them. Then:

"Charity is commanded," he proceeded, "but out of the hands of authority it is a difficult and treacherous virtue. The people are without comprehension." He made a gesture of contempt.

"With age," the deliberate voice went on, "the soul grows restless and moves in strange directions, struggling to throw off the burden of flesh. But I that know tell you"—Merlier paused at the door—"the charity of material benevolence, of gold, will cure no spiritual sores; for spirit is eternal, but the flesh is only so much dung." He stopped abruptly, coughed, as though he had carried his utterance beyond propriety. "The Nickleses," he repeated sombrely, "are worthless; they make trouble in my parish; with money they make more."

XI

THE year, in the immemorial, minute shifting of season, grew brittle and cold; the dusk fell sooner and night lingered late into morning.

William Vibard moved with his accordion from the porch to beside the kitchen stove. He was in the throes of a new piece, McGinty, and Gordon Makimmon was correspondingly surprised when, as he was intent upon some papers, Rose's husband voluntarily relinquished his instrument and sat in the room with him.

"What's the matter," Gordon indifferently inquired; "is she busted?"

William Vibard indignantly repudiated that possibility. A wave of purpose rose to the long, corrugated countenance, but sank, without finding expression in speech. Finally Gordon heard Rose calling her husband. That young man twitched in his chair, but he made no other move, no answer. Her voice rose again, sharp and urgent, and Gordon observed:

"Your wife's a-calling."

"I heard her, but I'd ruther sit right where I am."

She appeared in the doorway, flushed and angry.

"William," she commanded, "you come straight out here to the kitchen. I got a question for you."

"I'll stay just where I am for a spell," he replied, avoiding her gaze.

"You do as I tell you right off."

A stubborn expression settled over his face and shoulders. He made her no further reply. Rose's anger gathered in a tempest that she tried in vain to restrain.

"William," she demanded, "where is it? It's gone—you know what."

"I ain't seen it," he answered finally; "I really ain't, Rose."

"That's a story; only you knew. Come out here."

"Get along," Gordon interrupted testily. "How can I figure in this ruction?"

"I ain't agoing a step," William told them both; "I'm going to stop right here with Uncle Gordon."

"Well, then," the latter insisted, "get it through with—what is it?"

"I'll tell you what it is," William Vibard stammered; "it's a hundred and forty dollars Rose held out on you and kept in a drawer; that's what!"

Rose's emotion changed to a crimson consternation.

"Why, William Vibard! what an awful thing to say. What little money I had put by was saved from years. What a thing to say about me and Uncle Gordon."

"'Tain't no such thing you saved it; you held it out on him, dollars at a time. You didn't have no more right to it than I did."

Gordon's gaze centred keenly upon his niece's hot face. She endeavoured to sustain, refute, the accusation successfully; but her valour wavered,

broke. She disappeared abruptly. He surveyed Vibard without pleasure.

"You're a ramshackle contraption," he observed crisply.

"I got as good a right to it as her," the other repeated.

"A hundred and forty dollars," Gordon said bitterly; "that's a small business. Well, where is it? Have you got it?"

"No, I ain't," William exploded.

"Well—— ?"

"You can't never tell what might happen," the young man observed enigmatically; "the bellowses wear out dreadful quick, the keys work loose like, and then they might stop making them. It's the best one on the market."

"What scrabble's this? What did you do with the money?"

"They're in the stable," William Vibard answered more obscurely than before. "With good treatment they ought to last a life. They come cheaper, too, like that."

Gordon relinquished all hope of extracting any meaning from the other's elliptical speech. He rose. "If 'they're' in the stable," he announced, "I'll soon have some sense out of you." He procured a lantern and tramped shortly to the stable, closely followed by Rose's husband.

"Now!" he exclaimed, loosening the hasp of the door, throwing it open.

William Vibard entered and bent over a heap in an obscure corner. When he rose the lantern shone on two orderly piles of glossy black paper boxes. Gordon strode across the contracted space and

wrenched off a lid. . . . Within reposed a brand new accordion. There were nine others.

"You see," William eagerly interposed; "now I'm fixed good."

At the sight of the grotesque waste a swift resentment moved Gordon Makimmon—it was a mockery of his money's use, a gibing at his capability, his planning. The petty treachery of Rose added its injury. He pitched the box in his hands upon the clay floor, and the accordion fell out, quivering like a live thing.

"Hey!" William Vibard remonstrated; "don't do like that . . . delicate——" He knelt, with an expression of concern, and, tenderly fingering the instrument, replaced it in the box.

Gordon turned sharply and returned to the house. Rose was in her room. He could hear her moving rapidly about, pulling at the bureau drawers. Depression settled upon him; he carried the lantern into the bedroom, where he sat bowed, troubled. He was aroused finally by the faint strains of William's latest melodic effort drifting discreetly from the stable.

The next morning the Vibards departed. Rose was silent, her face, red and swollen, was vindictive. On the back of the vehicle that conveyed them to the parental Berry's was securely tied the square bundle that had "fixed good" William Vibard musically for life.

XII

Gordon Makimmon, absorbed in the difficult and elusive calculations of his indefinable project, was unaware of the change wrought by their departure, of the shifting of the year, the familiar acts and living about him. He looked up abruptly from the road when Valentine Simmons, upon the platform of the store, arrested his progress homeward.

Simmons's voice was high and shrill, as though time had tightened and dried his vocal cords; his cheeks were still round and pink, but they were sapless, the colour lingered like a film of desiccated paint.

The store remained unchanged: Sampson, the clerk, had gone, but another, identical in shirt sleeves upheld by bowed elastics, was brushing the counters with a turkey wing; the merchandise on the shelves, unloaded from the slow procession of capacious mountain wagons, flowed in an endless, unvaried stream to the scattered upland homes.

Valentine Simmons took his familiar place in the glass enclosure, revolving his chair to fix on Gordon a bird-like attention.

"As an old friend," he declared, "an old Presbyterian friend, I want to lay some of my experience before you. I want to complain a little, Gordon; I have the right . . . my years, Pompey's associate.

The fact is—you're hurting the County, you're hurting the people and me; you're hurting yourself. Everybody is suffering from your—your mistaken generosity. We have all become out of sorts, unbalanced, from the exceptional condition you have brought about. It won't do, Gordon; credit has been upset, we don't know where we stand or who's who; it's bad.

"I said you suffered with the rest of us, but you are worse off still. How shall I put it?—the County is taking sad advantage of your, er—liberality. There's young Entriken; he was in the store a little time ago and told me that you had extended his note again. He thought it was smart to hold out the money on you. There's not a likelier farm, not better conditioned cattle, than his in Greenstream. He could pay twenty notes like yours in a day's time. I hate to see money cheapened like that; it ain't healthy.

"What is it you're after, Gordon? Is it at the incorruptible, the heavenly, treasure you're aiming? But if it is, I'll venture this—that the Lord doesn't love a fool. And the man with the talents—don't overlook him."

"I'm not aiming at anything," Gordon answered; "I'm just doing."

"And there's that Hagan that got five thousand from you; it's an open fact about him. He came from the other end of the state, clear from Norfolk, to get a slice. He gave you the address, the employment, of a kin in Greenstream and left for parts unknown. No, no, the Lord doesn't love a fool."

"I may be a fool as you see me," Gordon contended stubbornly; "and the few liars that get my

money may laugh. But there's this, there's this, Simmons—I'm not cursed by the dispossessed and the ailing and the plumb penniless. I don't go to a man with his crop a failure on the field, like—well, we'll say, Cannon does, with a note in my hand for his breath. I've put a good few out of—of Cannon's reach. Did you forget that I know how it feels to hear Ed Hincle, on the Courthouse steps, call out my place for debt ? Did you forget that I sat in this office while you talked of old Presbyterian friends and sold me into the street ?"

" Incorrigible," Valentine Simmons said, " incorrigible; no sense of responsibility. I had hoped Pompey's estate would bring some out in you. But I should have known—it's the Makimmon blood; you are the son of your father. I knew your grandfather too, a man that fairly insulted opportunity."

" We've never been storekeepers."

" Never kept much of anything, have you, any of you ? You can call it what you've a mind to, liberality or shiftlessness. But there's nothing saved by names. There: it seems as if you never got civilized; always contemptuous and violent-handed . . . it's the blood. I've studied considerable about you lately; something'll have to be done for the good of all."

" What is it you want of me ?"

" Call in your bad debts," the other promptly responded; " shake off the worthless lot hanging to your pocket. Put the money rate back where it belongs. Why, in days gone by," Valentine Simmons chuckled, " seventy per cent. wasn't out of the way for a forced loan, forty was just so-so. Ah, Pompey and me made some close deals.

Pompey multiplied his talents. The County was an open ledger to him."

"Didn't you ever think of the men who had to pay you seventy per cent.?" Gordon asked, genuinely curious.

"Certainly," Simmons retorted; "we educated them, taught 'em thrift. While you are promoting idleness and loose-living. . . . But this is only an opening for what I wanted to say. I had a letter last week from the Tennessee and Northern people: the Buffalo plan has matured, they're pushing the construction right along."

"I intended to come to you about that."

"Well?"

"I ain't going on with our agreement."

Simmons's face exhibited not a trace of concern.

"I may say," he returned smoothly, "that I am not completely surprised. I have been looking for something of the kind. I must remind you that our partnership is a legal and binding instrument; you can't break it, nor throw aside your responsibility, with a few words. It will be an expensive business for you."

"I'm willing to pay with what I've got."

The other held up a palm in his familiar, arresting gesture. "Nothing of that magnitude; nothing out of the way; I only wanted to remind you that a compensation should follow your decision. It puts me in a very nice position indeed. I gather from your refusal to continue the partnership that you do not intend to execute singly the original plan; it is possible that you will not hold the options against the coming of transportation."

"You've got her," Gordon declared; "I'm not

going to profit seventy times over, tie up all that timber, from the ignorance of men that ought to rightly advantage from it. I—I—" Gordon rose to his feet in the harassing obscurity of his need; "I don't want to make! I don't want to take anything . . . never again! I want——"

"You forget, unfortunately, that I am forced to be accessory to your—your change of heart. I may say that I shall have to pay dearly for your—your eleventh hour conversion. Timber will be—unsteady."

"Didn't you mention getting something out of it?"

"A mere detail to my effort, my time. What my timber will be worth, with what you throw on the market hawking up and down . . . problematic."

Gordon Makimmon hesitated, a plan forming vaguely, painfully, in his mind. Finally, "I might buy you out," he suggested, "if you didn't ask too dam' much. Then I could do as I pleased with the whole lot."

"Now that," Valentine Simmons admitted, dryly cordial, "is a plan worth consideration. We might agree on a price, a low price to an old partner. You met the Company's agents, heard the agreement outlined; a solid proposal. And, as you say, with the timber control in your own hands, you could arrange as you pleased with the people concerned."

He grew silent, enveloped in thought. Then:

"I'll take a hundred thousand for all the options I bought, for my interest in the partnership."

"I don't know as I could manage that," Gordon admitted.

An unassumed astonishment marked the other's

countenance. "Why!" he ejaculated, "Pompey left an estate estimated at——" He stopped from sheer surprise.

"Some of the investments went bad," Gordon continued; "down in Stenton they said I didn't move 'em fast enough. Then the old man had a lot laid out in ways I don't hold with, with people I wouldn't collect from. And it's a fact a big amount's got out here lately. Of course, it will come back, the most part."

Simmons's expression grew sceptical.

"I know you too," Gordon added; "you'll want the price in your hand."

"I'm getting on," the storekeeper admitted; "I can't wait now."

"I don't know if I can make it," Gordon repeated; "it'll strip me if I do."

Valentine Simmons swung back to his desk. "At least," he observed, "keep this quiet till something's settled."

Gordon agreed.

XIII

Even if he proved able to buy out Simmons, he thought, walking home, it would be a delicate operation to return the timber rights to where he thought they belonged. He considered the possibility of making a gift of the options to the men from whom they had been wrongfully obtained. But something of Simmons's shrewd knowledge of the world, something of the priest's contemptuous arraignment of material values, lingering in Gordon's mind, convinced him of the potential folly of that course. It would be more practical to sell back the options to those from whom they had been purchased, at the nominal prices paid. He had only a vague idea of his balances at the Stenton banks, the possibilities of the investments from which he received profit. He was certain, however, that the sum asked by Valentine Simmons would obliterate his present resources. Yet he was forced to admit that it did not seem exorbitant.

He continued his altruistic deliberations throughout the evening at his dwelling. It might be well, before investing such a paramount sum, to communicate with the Tennessee and Northern Company, receive a fresh ratification of their intention. Yet he could not do that without incurring the danger of premature questioning, investigation. It

was patent that he would have to be prepared to make an immediate distribution of the options when his intention became known in Greenstream. He was aware that when the coming of a railroad to the county became common knowledge the excitement of the valley would grow intense.

Again, it might be better first to organize the timber of Greenstream, so that a harmonious local condition would facilitate all negotiations and avert the danger, which Valentine Simmons had pointed out, of individual blindness and competition. But, in order to accomplish that, he should have to bring into concord fifty or more wary, suspicious, and largely ignorant adults. He should have to deal with swift and secret avarice, with vain golden dreams born of years of bitter poverty, privation, ceaseless and incredible toil. The magnitude of the latter task appalled him; fact and figure whirled in his confused mind. He was standing, and he suddenly felt dizzy, and sat down. The giddiness vanished, but left him with twitching fingers, a clouded vision. He might get them all together, explain, persuade. . . . Goddy! it was for their good. They needn't be gross-grained. There it would be, the offer, for them to take or leave. But, if they delayed, watch out! Railroad people couldn't be fooled with. They might get left: that was all.

This, he felt, was more than he could undertake, more than any reasonable person would ask. If he paid Valentine Simmons all that money, and then let them have back their own again, without a cent to himself, they must be content. They should be

able to bargain as well as he — who was getting on and had difficulty in adding figures to the same amount twice — with the Tennessee and Northern.

The following morning he departed for Stenton.

XIV

Gordon paid Valentine Simmons eighty-nine thousand dollars for the latter's share of the timber options they had held in common. They were seated in the room in which Gordon conducted his peculiar transactions. He turned and placed Simmons's acknowledgment, the various papers of the dissolved partnership, in the safe.

"That finishes all I had in Stenton," he observed.

Valentine Simmons made no immediate reply. He was intent, with tightly-folded lips, on the cheque in his hand. His shirt, as ever, was immaculately starched, the blue button was childlike, bland; but it was cold without, and hot in the room where they sat, and the colour on his cheeks resembled dabs of vermilion on buffers of old white leather; the tufts of hair above his ears had dwindled to mere cottony scraps.

"Prompt and satisfactory," he said at last. "I tell you, Gordon, you can see as far as another into a transaction. Promises are of no account, but value received . . ." He held up the cheque, a strip of pale orange paper, pinched between withered fingers.

Suddenly he was in a hurry to get away; he drew his overcoat of close-haired brown hide about his narrow shoulders and trotted to the door, to his buggy awaiting him at the corner of the porch.

XV

Gordon placed on the table before him the statements and accounts of his newly-augmented options. The papers, to his clerical inefficiency, presented a bewildering mass of inexplicable details and accounts. He brought them, with vast difficulty, into a rough order. In the lists of the acreages of timber controlled there were appended none of the names of those from whom his privilege of option had been obtained, no note of the slightly-varying sums paid—the sole, paramount facts to Gordon now. For the establishment of these he was obliged to refer to the original individual contracts, to compare and add and check off.

Old Pompey had conducted his transactions largely from his buggy, lending them a speciously casual aspect. The options made to him were written on slips of paper hastily torn from a cheap note-book, engrossed on yellowing sheets of foolscap in tremulous Spencerian. Their wording was informal, often strictly local. One granted privilege of purchase of " the piney trees on Pap's and mine but not Henny's for nineteen years." Another bore above the date, " In this year of Jesus Christ's holy redemption."

The sales made to Valentine Simmons were, invariably, formal in record, the signatures were all witnessed.

It was a slow, fatiguing process. A number of the original vendors, Gordon knew, had died, their families were scattered; others had removed from the county; logical substitutes had to be evolved. The mere comparison of the various entries, the tracing of the tracts to the amounts involved, was scarcely within Gordon's ability.

He laboured through the swiftly-falling dusk into the night, and took up the task early the following morning. A large part of the work had to be done a second, third, time—his brain, unaccustomed to concentrated mental processes, soon grew weary; he repeated aloud a fact of figures without the least comprehension of the sounds formed by his lips, and he would say them again and again, until he had forced into his blurring mind some significance, some connection.

He would fall asleep over his table, his scattered papers, in the grey daylight, or in the radiance of a large glass lamp, and stay immobile for hours, while his dog lay at his feet, or, uneasy, nosed his sharp relaxed knees.

No one would seek him, enter his house, break his exhausted slumbers. Lying on an out-flung arm, his head, with its sunken, closed eyes, loose lips, seemed hardly more alive than the photographed clay of Mrs. Hollidew in the sitting-room. He would wake slowly, confused; the dog would lick his inert hand, and they would go together in search of food to the kitchen.

On the occasions when he was forced to go to the post-office, the store, he went hurriedly, secretively, in a coat as green, as aged, as Pompey's own.

He was anxious to finish his labour, to be released

from its responsibility, its weight. It appeared tremendously difficult to consummate; it had developed far beyond his expectation, his original conception. The thought pursued him that some needy individual would be overlooked, his claim neglected. No one must be defrauded; all, all, must have their own, must have their chance. He, Gordon Makimmon, was seeing that they had, with Lettice's money . . . because . . . because . . .

The leaves had been swept from the trees; the mountains were gaunt, rocky, against swift low clouds. There was no sunlight except for a brief sullen red fire in the west at the end of day. At night the winds blew bleakly down Greenstream valley. Shutters were locked, shades drawn, in the village; night obliterated it absolutely. No one passed, after dark, on the road above.

He seemed to be toiling alone at a hopeless, interminable task, isolated in the midst of a vast uninhabited desolation, in a black chasm filled with the sound of whirling leaves and threshing branches.

The morning, breaking late and grey and cold, appeared equally difficult, barren, vain. The kitchen stove, continually neglected, went continually out, the grate became clogged with ashes, the chimney refused to draw. He relit it, on his knees, the dog patiently at his side; he fanned the kindling into flames, poured on the coal, the shining black dust coruscating in instant gold tracery. He bedded the horse more warmly, fed him in a species of mechanical, inattentive regularity.

Finally the list of timber options he possessed was completed, with the names of their original owners and the amounts for which they had been bought.

A deep sense of satisfaction, of accomplishment, took the place of his late anxiety. Even the weather changed, became complacent—the valley was filled with the blue mirage of Indian summer, the apparent return of a warm, beneficent season. The decline of the year seemed to halt, relent, in still, sunny hours. It was as though nature, death, decay, had been arrested, set at naught; as though man might dwell for ever amid peaceful memories, slumbrous vistas, lost in that valley hidden by shimmering veils from all the implacable forces that bring the alternation of cause and effect upon subservient worlds and men.

XVI

As usual, on Saturday noon Gordon found his copy of the weekly *Bugle* projecting from his numbered compartment at the post-office. There were no letters. He thrust the paper into his pocket and returned to the village street. The day was warm, but the mists that had enveloped the peaks were dissolving, the sky was sparkling, clear. By evening, Gordon decided, it would be cold again, and then the long, rigorous winter would close upon the valley and mountains.

He looked forward to it with relief, as a period of somnolence and prolonged rest—the mental stress and labour of the past days had wearied him of the active contact with men and events. He was glad that they were, practically, solved, at an end—the towering columns of figures, the perplexing problems of equity, the far-reaching decisions.

In rehearsing his course it seemed impossible to have hit upon a better, a more comprehensive, plan. There was hardly a family he knew of in the valley of which some member might not now have his chance. That, an opportunity for all, was what Gordon was providing.

A number of horses were already hitched along the rail outside Valentine Simmons's store; soon the rail would hardly afford room for another animal.

He passed the Presbyterian Church, Dr. Pelliter's drugstore and dwelling, and approached his home. Seen from the road, the long roof was variously coloured from various additions; there were regions of rusty tar-paper, of tin with blistered remnants of dull red paint, of dark, irregular shingling.

It was a dwelling weather-beaten and worn, the latest addition, already discoloured by the elements, blended with the nondescript whole. It was like himself, Gordon Makimmon recognized; in him, as in the house below, things tedious or terrible had happened, the echoes of which lingered within the old walls, within his brain. . . . Now it was good that winter was coming, when they would lie through the long nights folded in snow, in beneficent quietude.

There were some final details to complete in his papers. He took off his overcoat, laid it upon the safe, and flung the *Bugle* on the table, where it fell half open and neglected. The names traced by his scratching pen brought clearly before him the individuals designated: Elias Wellbogast had a long, tangled grey beard and a gaze that peered anxiously through a settling blindness. Thirty acres—eight dollars an acre. P. Ville was a swarthy foreigner, called, in Greenstream, the Portugee; every crop he planted grew as if by magic. Old Matthew Zane would endeavour to borrow from Gordon the money with which to repurchase the option he had granted.

He worked steadily, while the rectangles of sunlight cast through the windows on the floor shortened and shifted their place. He worked until the figures swam before his eyes, when he laid aside

the pen and picked up the *Bugle*, glancing carelessly over the first page.

His attention immediately concentrated on the headlines of the left-hand column; his gaze had caught the words, " Tennessee and Northern."

" Goddy !" he exclaimed aloud; " they've got it in the *Bugle*, the railroad coming and all."

He was glad that the information had been printed: it would materially assist in the announcement and carrying out of his plan. He folded the paper more compactly, leaned back in his chair to read . . . Why ! . . . Why, damn it ! they had it all wrong; they were entirely mistaken; they had printed a deliberate—a deliberate——

He stopped reading to marshal his surprised and scattered faculties. Then, with a rigid countenance, he pursued the article to the end. When he had finished, his gaze remained subconsciously fastened upon the paper, upon the advertisement of a man who paid for and removed the bodies of dead animals.

Gordon Makimmon's lips formed, barely audibly, a name: he whispered, " Valentine Simmons."

At last the storekeeper had utterly ruined him. He raised the paper from where it had fallen and read the article once more. It was a floridly and violently written account of how a projected branch of the Tennessee and Northern System through Greenstream valley, long striven for by solid and public-spirited citizens of the county, had been prevented by the hidden avarice of a well-known local figure, an ex-stage driver.

The latter, the account proceeded, with a foreknowledge of the projected transportation, had

secured for little or nothing an option on practically all the desirable timber of the valley, and had held it at such a high figure that the railroad had been forced to abandon the scheme.

"What Greenstream thus loses through blind gluttony cannot be enumerated by a justly incensed pen. The loss to us, to our sons and daughters. . . . This secret and sinister schemer hid his purpose, it now appears, in a cloak of seeming benevolence. We recall a feeling of doubt, which we generously and wrongfully suppressed at the time, concerning the motives of such ill-considered . . ."

"Valentine Simmons," he repeated harshly. He controlled the *Bugle* in addition to countless other industries and interests of Greenstream. This article could not have been printed without Simmons's cognizance, his co-operation. It was the crown of his long and victorious struggle with Gordon Makimmon. The storekeeper had sold him the options knowing that the railroad was not coming to the valley—some inhibition had arisen in the negotiations—he had destroyed him with Gordon's own blindness, credulity. And he had walked like a rat into the trap.

The bitter irony of it rose in a wave of black mirth to his twisted lips; he, Gordon Makimmon, was exposed as an avaricious schemer with the prospects of Greenstream, with men's hopes, with their chances; yet Simmons, it was plainly intimated, had laboured faithfully and in vain for the people.

He rose and shook his clenched hands above his head. "If I had only shot him!" he cried. "If I had only shot him at first!"

It was too late now: nothing could be gained

by crushing the flickering vitality from that aged pinkish husk. It was, Gordon dimly realized, a greater power than that contained by a single individual, by Valentine Simmons, that had beaten him. It was a stupendous and materialistic force against the metallic sweep of which he had cast himself in vain—it was the power, the unconquerable godhead, of gold.

The thought of the storekeeper was lost in the realization of the collapse of all that he had laboriously planned. The destruction was absolute; not an inner desire nor need escaped; not a projection remained. The papers before him, so painfully comprehended, with such a determination of justice, were but the visible marks of the futility, the waste, of his dreaming.

He sank heavily into the chair before his table. He recalled the younger Entriken's smooth lies, the debauchery of his money by the Nickleses; William Vibard's accordions mocked him again . . . all, all had been in vain, worthless. General Jackson rose and laid his long, shaggy, heavy head upon Gordon's knee.

"We're done for!" he told the dog; "we're finished this time. Everything has gone to hell."

XVII

He felt strangely lost in the sudden emptiness of his existence, an existence that, only a few hours before, had welcomed the prospect of release from its bewildering fullness. He had gathered the results of his slowly-formulating consciousness, his tragic memory, to a final resolve in the return of the options to a county enhanced by the coming of a railroad whose benefits he would distribute to all. And now the railroad was no more than a myth, it had vanished into thin, false air, carrying with it . . .

He swept his hand through the papers of his vain endeavour, bringing a sudden confusion upon their order. His arm struck the glass of shot, and, for a short space, there was a continuous sharp patter on the floor. He rose and paced from wall to wall, a bent shape with open, hanging hands and a straggling grey wisp of hair across his dry, bony forehead.

Footsteps crossed the porch, a knock fell upon the door, and Gordon responded without raising his head.

It was Simeon Caley.

He had not been in the house since, together with his wife, he had left it after Lettice's death. Sim's stained felt hat was pushed back from a wet brow, his gestures were urgent.

"Get your horse in the buggy!" he exclaimed; "I'll help you. Light out."

"'Light out'?" Gordon's gaze centred upon the other's excitement. "Where?"

"That doesn't make much difference, so's you light. The County's mad clear through, and it's pretty near all in the village." Sim turned to the door. "I'll help you. And then—drive."

"I ain't agoing to drive anywhere," Gordon told him; "I'm where I belong."

"You don't belong in Greenstream after that piece in the *Bugle*." His hand rested on the knob. "Tie up anything you need; I'll hitch the buggy."

"Don't you touch a strap," Gordon commanded; "because I won't put a foot in her."

"It'll all settle down in a little; then maybe you can come back."

"What'll settle down?"

"Why, the deal with the railroad."

"Sim," Gordon demanded sharply, "you never believed that in the paper?"

"I don't know what to b'lieve," the other replied evasively; "a good many say those are the facts, that you have the options."

"Get out of here!" Gordon shouted in a sudden moving rage; "and stay out; don't come back when you find what's what."

"I c'n do that. And I'll point out to you we just came for Lettice, we never took nothing of yours. I only stopped now to warn you away . . . I'll hitch her up, Gordon; you get down the road."

"It's mine now, whose ever it was a while back. I've paid for it. You go."

Simeon Caley lingered reluctantly at the door.

Gordon stood rigidly; his eyes were bright points of wrath; his arm rose, with a finger indicating the world without. Sim slowly opened the door, stepped out upon the porch; he stayed a moment more, then closed himself from sight.

XVIII

The stir and heat of Sim's presence died quickly away; the house was without a sound; General Jackson lay like an effigy in ravelled black and buff wool. Gordon assembled the scattered papers on the table into an orderly pile. He moved into the kitchen, abstractedly surveyed the familiar walls; he walked through the house to the sitting-room, where he stood lost in thought:

The County was "mad clear through"; Sim, supposing him guilty, had warned him to escape, advised him to run away. . . . That had never been a habit of the Makimmons: he would not form it now, at the end. He was considering, not the mere probability of being shot, but the greater disaster that had already smashed the spring of his living. His sensibilities were deadened to any catastrophe of the flesh.

At the same time he was conscious of a mounting rage at being so gigantically misunderstood, and his anger mingled with a bitter contempt for Simeon Caley, for a people so blind, so credulous, so helpless in the grasp of a single shrewd individual.

He heard subdued voices without, and, through a window, saw that the sweep by the stream was filling with a sullen concourse of men; he saw their faces, grim and resentful, turned toward the house;

the sun struck upon the dusty black expanse of their hats.

He walked deliberately through the bedroom and out upon the porch. A sudden profound silence met his appearance, a shifting of feet, a concerted bald, inimical stare.

"Well?" Gordon Makimmon demanded. "You've read the *Bugle*. Well?"

He heard a murmur from the back of the throng, "Give it to him, we didn't come here to talk."

"'Give it to him,'" Gordon repeated thinly. "I see Ben Nickles there, behind that hulk from the South Fork; Nickles'll do it and glad. It will wipe off the two hundred dollars he had out of me for a new roof. Or there's Entriken if Nickles is afraid: his note falls due again soon."

"What about the railroad?"

"What about it? Greenstream's been settled for eighty years: why haven't you moved around and got one? Do you expect the President of the Tennessee and Northern to come up and beg you to let them lay tracks to your doors? If you'd been men you'd had one long ago, but you're just—just stock. I'd ruther be an outlaw on the mountain than any of you; I'd ruther be what you think I am; by God!" he cried out of his bitterness of spirit, "but I'd ruther be Valentine Simmons!"

"Have you got the options?" Entriken demanded —"all them that Pompey had and you bought?"

Gordon vanished into the house, and reappeared with the original contracts in his grasp.

"Here they are," he exclaimed; "I paid eighty-nine thousand dollars to get them, and they're worth —that." He flung them with a quick gesture into

the air, and the rising wind scattered them fluttering over the sere grass. "Scrabble for them in the dirt."

"You c'n throw them away now the railroad's left you."

"And before," Gordon Makimmon demanded, "do you think I couldn't have gutted you if I'd had a mind to? do you think anybody couldn't gut you? Why, you've been the mutton of every little storekeeper that let you off with a pound of coffee, of any note shaver that could write. The *Bugle* says I let out money to cover up the railway deal, but that'd be no better than giving it to stop the sight of the blind. God A'mighty! this transportation business you're only whining about now was laid out five years ago; the company's agents have driven in and out twenty times. . . ."

"Let him have it!"

"Spite yourselves!" Gordon Makimmon cried; "it's all that's left for you."

General Jackson moved forward over the porch. He growled in response to the menace of the throng on the sod, and jumped down to their level. A sudden dangerous murmur rose:

"The two hundred dollar dog! The joke on Greenstream!"

He walked alertly forward, his ears pricked up on his long skull.

"C'm here, General," Gordon called, suddenly urgent; "c'm back here."

The dog hesitated, turned toward his master, when a heavy stick, whirling out of the press of men, struck the animal across the upper forelegs. He fell forward with a sharp whine, and attempted

vainly to rise. Both legs were broken. He looked back again at Gordon, and then, growling, strove to reach their assailants.

Gordon Makimmon started forward with a rasping oath, but, before he could reach the ground, General Jackson had propelled himself to the fringe of humanity. He made a last convulsive effort to rise, his jaws snapped. . . . A short iron bar descended upon his head.

Gordon's face became instantly, irrevocably, the shrunken face of an old man.

The clustered men with the dead, mangled body of the dog before them; the serene, sliding stream beyond; the towering east range bathed in keen sunlight, blurred, mingled, in his vision. He put out a hand against one of the porch supports—a faded shape of final and irremediable sorrow.

He exhibited neither the courage of resistance nor the superiority of contempt; he offered, apparently, nothing material whatsoever to satisfy the vengeance of a populace cunningly defrauded of their just opportunities and profits; he seemed to be no more coloured with life, no more instinct with sap, than the crackling leaves blown by the increasing wind about the uneasy feet on the grass.

He lipped a short, unintelligible period, gazing intent and troubled at the throng. He shivered perceptibly: under the hard blue sky the wind swept with the sting of an icy knout. Then, turning his obscure, infinitely dejected back upon the silent menace of the bitter, sallow countenances, the harsh angular forms, of Greenstream, he walked slowly to the door. He paused, his hand upon the knob, as if arrested by a memory, a realization. The door

opened; the house absorbed him, presented unbroken its weather-worn face.

A deep, concerted sigh escaped from the men without, as though, with the vanishing of that bowed and shabby frame, they had seen vanish their last chance for reprisal, for hope.

XIX

The cold sharpened; the sky, toward evening, glittered like an emerald; the earth was black, it resembled a ball of iron spinning in the diffused green radiance of a dayless and glacial void. The stream before the Makimmon dwelling moved without a sound under banked ledges of ice.

A thread of light appeared against the façade of the house; it widened to an opening door, a brief glimpse of a bald interior, and then revealed the figure of a man with a lantern upon the porch. The light descended to the ground, wavered toward a spot where it disclosed the rigid dead shape of a dog. An uncertain hand followed the swell of the ribs to the sunken side, attempted to free the clotted hair on a crushed skull. The body was carefully raised and enveloped in a sack, laboriously borne to the edge of the silent stream.

There it was lost in the dark as the light moved to where it cast a limited, swinging illumination over the wall of a shed. It returned to the stiffly distended sack, and there followed the ring of metal on the iron-like earth. In the pale circle of the lantern a figure stooped and rose, a figure with an intent, furrowed countenance.

The digging took a long while, the frozen clods of earth fell with a scattering thud, the shadow of

the hole deepened by imperceptible degrees. Once the labour stopped, the sack was lowered into the ragged grave; but the opening was too shallow, and the rise and fall of the solitary figure recommenced.

The sack was finally covered from sight, from the appalling frigidity and space of the sky, from the frozen surface of the earth wrapped in stillness, in night. The clods were scraped back into the hole, stamped into an integral mass; the spade obliterated all trace of what lay hidden beneath, returned to the clay from which it had been momentarily animated by the enigmatic flitting spark of life.

The lantern retraced its path to the shed, to the porch; where, in a brief thread of light, in the shutting of a door, it disappeared.

XX

Gordon met Valentine Simmons squarely for the first time since the collapse of his laborious planning outside the post-office. The latter, with a senile and pleased chuckle, tapped him on the chest.

"Teach you to be provident, Gordon," he said in his high, rasping voice; "teach you to see further than another through a transaction; as far ain't near enough; most don't see at all."

The anger had evaporated from Gordon Makimmon's parched being: the storekeeper, he recognized, was sharper than all the rest of the County combined; even now the raddled old man was more acute than the young and active intelligences. He nodded and would have passed on, but the storekeeper, with a ponderous furred glove, halted him.

"We haven't had any satisfaction lately with the Stenton stage," he shrilled; "and I made out to ask —you can take it or leave it—if you'd drive again? It might be a kind of—he! he!—relax from your securities and investments."

Gordon, without an immediate reply, regarded him. He thought, in sudden approbation of a part, at least, of the past, that he could drive a stage better than any other man in a hundred, in a thousand; there, at least, no humiliating failure had overtaken

his prowess with whip and reins. The old occupation, the monotonous, restful miles of road sweeping back under the wheels, the pleasant, casual detachment of the passengers, the pride of accomplishment, irresistibly appealed to him.

Valentine Simmons's rheumy eyes interrogated him doubtfully above the fixed dry colour of his fallen cheeks.

"By God, Valentine!" Gordon exclaimed, "I'll do it; I'll drive her, and right, too. It takes experience to carry a stage fifty miles over these mountains day and day; it takes a man that knows his horses, when to slack up on 'em and when to swing the leather.... I'm ready any time you say."

"The stage goes out from Greenstream tomorrow; you can take it the trip after. Money same as before. And, Gordon—he! he!—don't you go and lend it out at four per cent.; fifty's talking, but seventy's good. Pompey knew the trick; he'd have dressed you down to an undershirt, Pompey would."

Gordon returned slowly, absorbed in new considerations, to his dwelling. It was obvious that he could not live there alone and drive the Stenton stage; formerly Clare had attended to the house for him, but now there was no one to keep the stoves lit, to attend to the countless daily necessities. This was Tuesday—he would take the stage out on Thursday: he might as well get together a few necessities and close the place at once.

"I'll shut her right in," he said aloud in the empty, echoing kitchen.

He decided to touch nothing within. In the sitting-room the swift obscurity of the closing shutters

obliterated its familiar features—the table with the lamp and pink celluloid thimble, the phonograph, the faded photograph of what had been Mrs. Hollidew. The darkness spread to the bedroom that had been Lettice's and his: the curtained wardrobe was drawn, the bed lay smoothly sheeted with the quilt folded brightly at the foot, one of the many small glass lamps of the house stood filled upon the bureau. The iron safe was eclipsed, the pens upright in the glass of shot, the kitchen and spaces beyond.

Finally, depositing an ancient bag of crumbling leather on the porch, he locked himself out. He moved the bag to the back of the buggy and, hitching the horse into the worn gear, drove up the incline to the public road, to the village, without once turning his head.

XXI

He rose at five on Thursday and consumed a hasty breakfast by a blur of artificial light in the deserted hotel dining-room. It was pitch black without, the air heavy with moisture and penetrating. He led the horses from the shed under which he had hitched them to the stage, and climbed with his lantern into the long-familiar place by the whip. A light streamed from the filmy window of the post-office, falling upon tarnished nutcrackers and picks in a faded plush-lined box ranged behind the glass. Gordon could see the dark moving bulk of the postmaster within. The leather mail bags, slippery in the wet atmosphere, were strapped in the rear, and Gordon was tightening the reins when he was hailed by a man running over the road. It was Simmons's clerk.

"The old man says," he shot between laboured breaths, "to keep a watch on Buck. Buckley's coming back with you to-morrow. He's been down to the hospital for a spell. There ain't liable to be anybody else on the stage this time of year."

The horses walked swiftly, almost without guidance, over the obscured way. The stage mounted, turning over the long ascent to the crown of the east range. Gordon put out the lantern. A faint grey diluted the dark; the night sank thinly

to morning, a morning overcast with sluggish clouds; the bare trees, growing slowly perceptible, dripped with moisture; a treacherous film of mud overlaid the adamantine road.

The day broke inexpressibly featureless and dreary. The stage dropped to bald brown valleys, soggy fields and clear, hurrying streams; it rose deliberately to heights blurred in aqueous vapours. The moisture remained suspended throughout the day; the grey pall hid Stenton as he drove up to the tavern that formed his depot on the outskirts of the city.

Later, in the solitude of his room, he heard the hesitating patter of rain on the roof. He thought, stretching his weary frame on the rigorous bed, that if it turned cold through the night, the frozen road would be dangerous to-morrow.

XXII

Buckley Simmons was late in arriving from the hospital, and it was past seven before the stage departed for Greenstream. Buckley sat immediately behind Gordon Makimmon; his head, muffled in a long woollen scarf, showed only his dull, unwitting gaze.

They rapidly left the dank stone streets and houses. The smoke ascending from the waterworks was no greyer than the day. The rain fell in small, chill, gusty sweeps.

Gordon Makimmon settled resolutely to the long drive; he was oblivious of the miles of sodden road stretching out behind, he was not aware of the pale, dripping wintry landscape—he was lost in a continuous train of memories wheeling bright and distant through his mind. He was looking back upon the features of the past as he might have looked at a series of dissolving pictures, his interest in which was solely that of spectator.

They were without unity, unintelligible in the light of any concerted purpose or result. They were, however, highly pleasant, or amazingly inexplicable. For example:

His wife, Lettice—how young she was, smiling at him from the sunny grass! She walked happily toward him, with her shawl about her shoulders,

but she didn't reach him; she was sitting in the rocking chair on the porch . . . the day faded, she was singing a little throaty song, sewing upon a little square of white—she was gone as swiftly, as utterly, as a shadow. The shape of Meta Beggs, animated with incomprehensible gestures, took its place in the procession of his memories. She, grimacing, came alike to naught, vanished. All stopped for a moment and then disappeared, leaving no trace behind.

He mechanically arrested the horses before the isolated buildings that formed the midday halt.

Buckley Simmons, crouching low over the table, consumed his dinner with formless guttural approbation. The place above his forehead, where he had been struck by the stone, was puckered and dark. He raised his eyes—the unquenchable hatred of Gordon Makimmon flared momentarily on his vacuous countenance like the flame of a match lit in the wind.

Once more on the road, the rain stopped, the cold increased; high above the earth the masses of cloud gathered wind-herded in the south. The dripping from the trees ceased, the black branches took on a faint glitter; the distant crash of a falling limb sounded from the woods.

Gordon, doubting whether the horses' shoes had been lately roughed, descended, but, to his surprise, found that the scoring had been properly maintained, in spite of the fact that it had not had his attention. He had little cause to swing the heavy whip—the off horse, a raw-boned animal coloured yellowish-white, never ceased pulling valiantly on the traces; he not only assumed his own share of

the labour, but was willing to accept that of his companion, and Gordon had continually to restrain him.

The glitter spread transparently over the road; the horses dug their hoofs firmly into the frozen ruts. Suddenly a burst of sunlight enveloped the land, and the land responded with an instant, intolerable brilliancy, a blinding sheet of white radiance. Every limb, every individual twig and blade of grass, was covered with a sparkling, transparent mail; every mound of brown earth scintillated in a crisp surface of ice, like chocolate confections glazed in clear sugar. The clouds dissolved; the trees, encased in crystal pipes, rose dazzling against a pale, luminous blue expanse. Gigantic swords of incandescence shifted over the mountainside; shoals of frosty sparks filled the hollows; haloes immaculate and uncompassionate hung above the hills.

Viewed from the necessity of the driver of the Stenton stage, this phenomenon was highly undesirable,—the glassy road enormously increased the labour of the horses; Gordon's vigilance might not for a minute be relaxed. The blazing sun blurred his vision, the cold crept insidiously into his bones. The stage slowly made its way into the valleys, over the ranges; and, with it, the sun made its way over valley and mountain toward the west.

At last the stage reached the foot of Buck Mountain; beyond lay the village, the end of day. The horses cautiously began the ascent, while Gordon, watching their progress, lent them the assistance of his judgment and voice. The road looped a cleared field against the mountain; on the

left an icy slope fell away in a glittering tangle of underbrush. The stage turned, and the opening dropped upon the right. .

Gordon heard a thick, unintelligible sound from behind, and, looking about, saw Buckley Simmons clambering out over the wheel. He stopped the horses, but Buckley slipped, fell upon the road. However, he quickly scrambled erect and walked beside the stage, over the incline. His head was completely hidden by the woollen scarf; in one hand he carried a heavy switch. The road swung about once more, and, at the turn, the fall was abrupt. Buckley Simmons stumbled across the space that separated him from the horses. And Gordon, with an exclamation of incredulous surprise, saw the other's arm sweep up. The switch fell viciously across the back of the yellowish-white horse.

The animal plunged back, dragging his companion against the stage. Gordon rose, lashing out with his voice and whip; the horses struggled to regain their foothold . . . slipped. . . . He felt the seat dropping away behind him. Then, with a violent wrench, a sliding crash, horses, stage, and man lurched down the incline.

XXIII

Gordon Makimmon rose to a sitting position on the glassy fall. Above him, to the right, the stage lay collapsed, its wheels broken in. Below, the yellowish-white horse, upon his back, drew his legs together, kicked out convulsively, and then rolled over, lay still. From the round belly the broken end of a shaft squarely projected. The other horse was lost in a thrashing thicket below.

Gordon exclaimed, "God A'mighty!" Then the thought flashed through his mind that, extraordinarily, he had not been hurt—he had fallen away from the plunging hoofs, his heavy winter clothes had preserved him from serious bruises. His face was scratched, his teeth ached intolerably, but, beyond that . . .

He rose shakily to his feet. As he moved, a swift, numbing pain shot from his right side, through his shoulder to his brain, where, apparently, it centred in a burning core of suffering. He choked unexpectedly on a warm, thick, salty tide welling into his throat. He said aloud, surprised, "Something's busted."

He swayed, but preserved himself from falling, and spat. Instantly there appeared before him on the shining ice a blot of vivid, living scarlet.

"That's bad," he added dully.

He must get up to the road, out of this damned mess. The stage, he, had not fallen far; the road was but a few yards above him, but the ascent, with the pain licking through him like a burning tongue, the unaccustomed, disconcerting choking in his throat, was incredibly toilsome, long.

Buckley Simmons was standing on the road with a lowered, vacant countenance, a face as empty of content, of the trace of any purpose, as a washed slate.

"You oughtn't to have done that, Buck," Gordon told him impotently; "you ought never to have done a thing like that. Why, just see . . ." Gordon Makimmon's voice was tremulous, his brain blurred from shock. "You went and killed that off horse, and a man never hitched a better. There's the mail, too; however it'll get to Greenstream on contract to-night I don't know. That was the hell of a thing to go and do! . . . off horse . . . willing——"

The sky flamed in a transcendent glory of aureate light; the molten gold poured in streams over the land, dripped from the still branches. The crashing of falling limbs sounded everywhere.

They were, Gordon knew, not half way up Buck Mountain. There were no dwellings between them and Greenstream village, no houses immediately at their back. The road wound up before them toward the pure splendour of sheer space. The cold steadily increased. Gordon's jaw chattered, and he saw that Buckley's face was pinched and blue.

"Got to move," Gordon articulated; "freeze out here." He lifted his feet, stamped them on the hard earth, while the pain leaped and flamed in his side.

He laboured up the ascent, but Buckley Simmons remained where he was standing. I'll let him stay, Gordon decided; he can freeze to death and welcome, no loss . . . after a thing like that. He moved forward once more, but once more stopped.

" C'm on," he called impatiently; " you'll take no good here." He retraced his steps and roughly grasped the other's arm, urging him forward. Buckley Simmons whimpered, but obeyed the pressure.

The long, toilsome course began, a trail of frequent scarlet patches marking their way. Buckley lagged behind, shaking with exhaustion and chill, but Gordon commanded him on; he pulled him over deep ruts, cursed him into renewed energy. This dangerously delayed their progress.

" I got a good mind to leave you," Gordon told him; " something's busted, and I want to make the village soon's I can; and here you drag and hang back. You did it all, too. C'm on, you dam' fool: I could get along twice as smart without you."

It seemed to Gordon Makimmon that, as he walked, the hurt within him was consuming flesh and bone; it was eating away his brain. The thick, salty taste persisted in his mouth, nauseating him.

The light faded swiftly to a mysterious violet glimmer in the sky, on the ground a cold phosphorescence that seemed to emanate from the ice.

Buckley Simmons could scarcely proceed; he fell, and Gordon drew him sharply to his feet. Finally Gordon put an arm about his shoulder, steadying him, forcing him on. He must hurry, he realized, while the other held him back, delayed the assistance that Gordon so desperately needed.

"I tell you," he repeated querulously, "I got to get along; something's broke inside. I'll leave you," he threatened; "I'll let you sit right here and go cold." It was an empty threat; he struggled on, giving Buckley his support, his determination, sharing the ebbing store of his strength.

As they neared the top of the mountain a flood of light colder than the ice poured from behind. The moon had risen, transforming the world into a crystal miracle. . . . Far below them was the Greenstream valley, the village. They struggled forward, an uncouth slipping bulk, under the soaring dead planet. Gleams of light shot like quicksilver about their feet, quivered in the clear gloom like trails of pale fire igniting lakes of argent flame. It was magnificent and cruel, a superb fantasy rippling over treacherous rocks, rock-like earth.

"Y' dam' idiot," Gordon mumbled, "if I die out here where'll y' be then? I'd like to know that. . . . Don't sit down on me again; I don't know's I could get you up, don't b'lieve I could. Like as not we won't make her. That was an awful good horse. I'm under contract to—to . . . Government."

Buckley Simmons sank to his knees; once more Gordon kicked him erect. He spat and spat, constantly growing weaker. "That's an awful lot of blood for a man to lose," he complained.

Suddenly he saw upon the right the lighted square of a window.

"Why!" he exclaimed weakly, "here's the valley."

He pushed Buckley toward the door, and there was an answering stir within . . . voices.

XXIV

An overwhelming desire possessed Gordon Makimmon to go home. He forgot the pressing necessity for assistance, the searing hurt within . . . he must go home. He stumbled forward, turning into an aside that led directly behind Dr. Pelliter's drug store to the road above the Makimmon dwelling. He moved blindly, instinctively, following the way bitten beneath his consciousness by a lifetime of usage.

The house was dark, but it was hardly darker than Gordon's brain. He climbed the steps to the porch; his hands fumbled among the keys in his pocket.

Feet tramped across the creaking boards, approaching him; a palm fell upon his shoulder; a crisp voice rang out uncomprehended at his ear. It said:

"I'd knocked on all the doors, and was just going. I wanted to see you at once——"

Gordon felt over the door in search of the place for the key.

"I say I wanted to see you," the voice persisted; "it's Edgar Crandall. You'll take pleasure from what I've got to tell."

The key slipped into its place and the bolt shot back. . . . Well, he was home. No other thought,

no other consciousness, lingered in his mind; even the pain, the unsupportable white core of suffering in his brain, was dulled. He placed his foot upon the threshold, but the hand upon his shoulder arrested him:

"Greenstream's going to have a bank," the voice triumphantly declared; "it's settled—part outside capital, part guaranteed right here. Paper shaving, robbery, finished . . . lawful rate . . . chance——"

It was no more to Gordon Makimmon than the crackling of the forest branches, no more than an inexplicable hindrance to a desired consummation.

"If it hadn't been for you, what you did for me . . . others . . . new courage, example of bigness —why! what's the matter with you, Makimmon? That's blood."

Gordon made a tremendous effort of will, of grim concentration. He freed himself from the detaining hand. "Moment," he pronounced. The single word was expelled as dryly, as lifelessly, as a projectile, from a throat insensate as the barrel of a gun. He vanished into the bitterly cold house.

The bare floors echoed to his plodding footsteps as he entered the bedroom beyond the dismantled chamber of the safe. A flickering desire to see led him to where, on the bureau, a lamp had been left. The chimney fell with a crash of splintering glass upon the floor, a match flared in his stiff fingers, and the unprotected wick burned with a choking, spectral blue light.

He saw, gazing at him from the black depths of the mirror above the bureau, a haggard face drained of all life, of all blood, with deep inky pools upon

the eyes. A sudden emotion stirred in the chill immobility creeping upward through him.

" Lettice !" he cried in a voice as flat as a spent echo; " Lettice !"

He stumbled back, sinking.

Edgar Crandall found him kneeling at the bed, his arms outflung across the counterpane, his head bowed between, with a blackening stain beneath his clay-cold lips, beneath his face scarred with immeasurable suffering, fixed in a last surprise.

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